

# Senior Living





# Learning a New Language

Learning a second (or even third) language isn't just for kids in school. Older adults can pick up a new language, too, as well as some health benefits.

“The evidence clearly demonstrates that there is no critical period for second-language learning, no biologically determined constraint on language-learning capacity that emerges at a particular age, nor any maturational process which requires that older language learners function differently than younger language learners,” says Professor Catherine Snow at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Training the brain to speak another language is a workout for your synapses. It opens new pathways, keeping your gray matter nice and healthy, possibly delaying dementia and other cognitive illnesses.

Older adults may also have a leg up on younger learners because they have established study techniques that work for them and, especially nowadays, access to technology that can make learning a new language a snap.

The British Council, the United Kingdom's international organization for cultural relations and education, says it may help older learners to use visual and auditory mnemonic devices, examples and memory



© ADOBE STOCK

associations, and to systematically repeat and recycle grammar, vocabulary and expression.

Older students of a new language should be encouraged to use their wealth of experience to help them learn the new language and to use their new

skills uninterrupted for as long as possible.

While tech tools such as Rosetta Stone or Duolingo are great, and often available from the public library and other sources, classes are a great way for seniors to practice their language skills. Classes, which may

be available for free or at a low cost at local community centers, libraries and universities, offer professional instruction and the ability to connect socially, which adds another layer to improving senior living.

Aim to practice a little bit every day in short spurts rather

than cramming. It didn't work in high school and it doesn't work now. Try using streaming services to find television shows, news reports and other programming in the language you're learning if you can't speak it with someone or use an app.



# Become a Mentor

With age comes wisdom, often enough, and plenty of life skills. Share those life skills with younger people to pass on some of that knowledge and make social connections that can keep you moving and healthy.

## SKILLS NEEDED

Mentor.org says most of us had a teacher, coach or co-worker who took us under their wing at some point. Think about that person and the skills they had and shared with you. The website says good mentors should have a desire to help younger people, active listening skills, empathy and flexibility.

## FINDING A PROGRAM

Mentor.org says to consider at least three different organizations when looking to become a mentor. Start by talking to the organization's volunteer coordinator about your experience and the organization's needs. Be honest about the amount of time you can commit, the types of activities you're comfortable with and the number of people you'd like to mentor.

Ask about the process the organization uses to match mentors and mentees and be sure you understand the



© ADOBE STOCK

process. Also make sure you know the types of mentorship relationships the organization offers. You may be comfortable with one-on-one mentoring, but not group mentoring, for example.

Find out about any training opportunities that may be available and how frequently new training comes up or

may be required.

## APPLYING TO BE A MENTOR

Talk to the coordinator about the mentoring application process, including any screening and background checks that need to take place. You may need to submit a written application, which

may include personal and professional references and an interview. Don't be discouraged if your first opportunity doesn't pan out. There are plenty of programs out there that can use your skills.

## CONCERNS

It may seem daunting at first, especially if the organization

works with young people that may have had bad experiences in the past.

Don't be worried if it takes time to cultivate a lasting and productive relationship. Learn what to do if anything serious comes up during the mentoring relationship, such as anything that may necessitate reporting to authorities.

# Home Projects to Make Life Easier

More and more seniors are opting to age in place in their homes rather than downsize or move to assisted living facilities. With a little work, seniors can stay in their family home for longer.

Here are some projects recommended by the AARP.

## LIGHTING

The U.S. doesn't have height requirements for electrical outlets or switches, so they could be at any height in the house. For comfortable aging in place, consider raising the outlets and lowering the switches so they are easier to reach from a seated position, such as in a wheelchair. Opt for paddle-style switches rather than traditional toggle switches as they are easier to use with a knuckle or elbow. Consider installing more lighting than you think you need. As seniors lose vision, extra lighting can help them be independent longer.

## WINDOWS AND DOORS

Widen doorframes, when you can. This will make your home more accessible if you need to transition to a wheelchair or scooter for mobility. Also chose door knobs and other hardware that can easily be turned. Think about using



© ADOBE STOCK

them without the full use of hands or arms. There should be at least one way to get into and out of the homes without using steps.

## KITCHENS AND BATHS

In the kitchen, opt for various height countertops so there's a place for the standing

and seated cook. Choose storage options that don't require lifting or excessive pulling or bending. Look for pull-out drawers and trays that can increase usability. Situate appliances so hazards are eliminated. For instance, look at ranges with controls on the front so you won't have to

reach over hot pots to adjust the temperature. Keep microwaves and dishwashers where they can be used by people sitting or standing.

Securely mount toilets to the wall at the proper heights to be useful. Mind where doors open and close and make sure there is plenty of room for people to

use them with a mobility aid. While a hot bath is great for aching muscles, a shower is generally more usable and safer than a bathtub. Eliminate any step or lip to the shower entry and, if possible, choose a large enough shower to accommodate a seated transfer or roll-in use.



# Travel Tips for Seniors

Many older Americans plan to spend their golden years traveling, which is great. It keeps people physically and mentally healthy, improving brain function, and it's fun.

"In general, traveling, going to new places and meeting up with family and old and new friends is really vital for our mental health," says Kathleen Cameron, former senior director of the National Council on Aging's Center for Healthy Aging.

## STAYING HEALTHY

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention maintains a list of travel health notices for countries around the world. These notices inform travelers of all ages or outbreaks, natural disasters and other events that can affect health.

These notices are categorized into four levels. The first, Level 1, is for travelers to practice the usual precautions for their destination, such as consuming bottled water.

Level 2 includes enhanced precautions and may also identify specific risk populations. Level 3 urges travelers to reconsider nonessential travel and Level 4 cautions travelers there is an extreme



© ADOBE STOCK

health risk.

If your trip includes a long flight, NCOA says planes are usually less humid than the normal environment, which can put travelers at higher risk of dehydration and respiratory disease. Drink lots of water and walk in the aisle to prevent blood clots.

## STAYING SAFE

As exciting as trips are, avoid posting travel plans on social media. The NCOA says thieves use social media to target homes where the occupants are out of town. Consider asking a friend or family member to check in on the house periodically, turning

lights off and on and grabbing any mail or packages.

On the road, use your hotel room's safe for passports, jewelry and cash. Double check that the code works before placing anything inside. Look for bags and wallets that guard against pickpockets. Look for jackets and pants with

magnetically sealed pockets, inside pockets and other storage options to foil thieves.

Before leaving, call credit card companies and banks to let them know your destinations. Take at least one back-up card in case the worst does happen, and also make sure you're carrying cash safely.



# Regular Exercise Has Many Benefits

Seniors should get 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity and two days of muscle-strengthening activities every week, the National Institute of Aging says.

It doesn't have to be all at once. Aim for small amounts of exercise throughout the day to net the total amount of minutes.

## GO SLOW

Don't jump in all at once. Increase physical activity gradually over a period of weeks or even months. And never start exercising before talking to your medical professionals about whether it's safe for you to do so. Whenever there's a break in your new fitness routine, gradually work your way up again to avoid injury.

## SET GOALS

Set realistic, specific fitness goals for yourself. The institute suggests goals such as a 10-minute walk three times per week. Review these goals regularly as you make progress. Consider using an app or other way to track your progress, or even keep a written log. Celebrate your successes and think about exercising with friends and family for more accountability.



© ADOBE STOCK

## VARY YOUR ACTIVITIES

Try to vary the types of exercise you get. Include a combination of aerobic, strengthening and balance activities. Some examples to get in your 150 minutes may include:

- Taking the stairs instead of an elevator (use the hand rails!).
- Working in the yard or

garden.

- Swimming or water aerobics.
- Dancing.
- Playing a low-impact sport, such as pickleball.

Look for indoor and outdoor activities and, when you can, try to build more physical activity into your daily life. Identify any barriers to physical activity, such as poor

weather, and plan for what to do when that happens. Plan your activities for the parts of the day when you have the most energy. You may find you get a boost of energy after some physical activity.

## GEAR

Work out in clothes and shoes that are comfortable and safe. Shoes should

support your feet, have non-skid soles and appropriate heel and arch support. Change them out regularly as you become more physically active.

Clothes should allow for a full range of movement and be appropriate for your climate. Look for fabrics that pull sweat away from the skin and dry quickly.



# Finding Volunteer Opportunities

Even if you're out of the workforce, you can still give to your communities through volunteer opportunities.

Researchers found that 80% of volunteers over the age of 55 reported having good, very good or excellent health versus 50% of non-volunteers of similar ages and backgrounds, Silver Sneakers says.

"Volunteers have lower mortality rates, lower rates of depression, increased strength and energy, and fewer physical limitations than those who do not volunteer," says Samantha Jo Warfield with the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Here are some opportunities to give back in your community.

## SENIOR CORPS

Senior Corps is a government agency that helps seniors find volunteer opportunities. Through the Foster Grandparent program, seniors can serve as role models to children and another program, Senior Companion, connects seniors with people who need help with daily tasks such as grocery shopping and paying bills. The agency matches more than 143,000 senior volunteers with opportunities every year. More than 47 million hours have been served by Senior Corps volunteers.



© ADOBE STOCK

## NATIONAL OR STATE PARKS

National and state parks always need volunteers to help take care of public lands by greeting visitors, leading tours, handing out information and more. You can even turn your volunteerism into a season-long trip by becoming a campground host (you get a free campsite). Look for opportunities posted on

Volunteer.gov or with the state parks agency in your state.

## MEALS ON WHEELS

Meals on Wheels has 5,000 independently run local programs to provide meals to homebound seniors. Volunteers pick up meals at a central location and deliver them along a predetermined route. Meals on Wheels

spokesperson Jenny Bertollette Young told Silver Sneakers that a volunteer may be the only person the homebound senior sees that day. And as the U.S. population ages, more volunteers will be needed.

## CANINE COMPANIONS FOR INDEPENDENCE

This organization connects expertly trained service dogs to people with disabilities. It

has six training centers across the country and more than 40 volunteer chapters. Volunteers raise puppies from eight weeks to 18 months, taking it to puppy classes, teaching it basic commands and socializing the dog. If you can't help this organization, but still love animals, consider volunteering with a local animal shelter walking, playing with and socializing the animals there.

# Rejoining the Workforce

While many seniors have worked their whole lives looking forward to retirement and not having to work every day, T. Rowe Price says millions of retirees have rejoined the work force, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic forced the retirement of about 2.4 million people, the Federal Reserve of St. Louis says. Many of those people have since unretired, returning to the workforce post-pandemic.

About half of those returning to work say they're returning to work due to financial reasons while another 45% say they're coming back for social and emotional benefits. Retirees working full-time again say they are most often motivated for mental stimulation and professional fulfillment.

Other reasons to return to work, Forbes says, are benefits such as medical insurance, challenges with relationships, and life disruptions such as a reduction in retirement income.

Think of your age and experience as a powerful asset, The Senior Source, a resource for re-entering the workforce, says. Showcase your accomplishments instead of making a



© ADOBE STOCK

chronological list of your jobs. Highlight what you will bring to the organization, including an inventory of the skills you developed before retirement and how they would best apply to the jobs you're considering. Look to roles where experience is valued, such as caregivers, health care, education and

nonprofits.

Consider improving your technology skills. Take a class at a local college, community center or library to get up to speed on computing skills that may have evolved since you left the workforce.

While unretirement has its benefits, there are also some

drawbacks. Forbes says these may include reduced Social Security benefits, Medicare surcharges and higher tax burdens. If you're in a situation where you're forced to return to work, you may resent needing to go to work and find yourself getting more tired than you did before you

retired.

Prepare for these potential obstacles before signing on the dotted line and accepting any new job offer. Talk to a financial planner about the consequences of getting a paycheck again, especially if it would affect retirement income you've been relying on.