

What you do today will affect your future. Nowhere is this as true as it is in issues regarding aging. The way in which you take care of yourself through the years, both physically and mentally, will affect the natural process of aging. No one knows this better than centenarians, people who are 100 years old and older. The book *Blue Zones, Lessons for Living Longer from the People Who've Lived the Longest*, by Dan Buettner, identifies 12 healthy behavior practices that encourage optimal aging throughout the life span. These 12 keys aim to help people grow old gracefully, successfully, and with increased longevity.

The first of which is positive attitude.

The connection between the mind and body is strong, so an overall positive attitude — including an upbeat outlook on life — can affect overall happiness, health, and well-being. Similar to good health practices such as eating well and getting plenty of exercise, a positive attitude should be a habit that starts early in life. A positive attitude can impact mental health and physical functioning, including the ability to fight disease and infection. Attitude can also affect relationships, social networks, and help make success in life more likely. The bottom line: being more positive across the lifespan causes less stress and enables people to live healthier, happy lives.

Attitude affects:

- how successful you are in achieving your academic, work, and personal goals;
- how you feel and look mentally and physically; and
- what you do and say.

Do you have a positive attitude?

- Are you optimistic, easygoing, or extroverted?
- Are you willing to learn, no matter how difficult it is?
- Do you laugh a lot or have a sense of humor by not taking yourself too seriously?
- Do you express emotions rather than bottle them up?
- Do you do your best when studying or working and try to improve how you do your work?
- Do you demonstrate enthusiasm in whatever you say and do?
- Do you welcome challenges, experiments, or try new ideas?

Develop a Positive Attitude:

- Be confident.
- Be positive.
- Be patient.
- Be a goal-setter.
- Be a hard-worker.

- Be fun (don't take yourself too seriously).
- Be accepting of change.

Accepting Change--Being able to accept and adapt to change plays an important role in having a positive attitude, especially as life is filled with ups and downs. A positive attitude allows you to meet such challenges — both the good and bad — with less resistance. In this position, you are much more open to learning from mistakes, researching what you want, or seeing the possibility of new or better opportunities. When you approach change with rigid thoughts or feelings of apprehension, strain and stress are more likely to result, leaving you overwhelmed and more susceptible to a sense of failure and even depression.

Do Things that Make You Happy

According to Martin Seligman, Ph.D., the creator of positive psychology, everybody has a right to be happy. Dr. Seligman also believes that happiness helps provide a sense of purpose in life because it is something that you can create and nurture. The Pursuit of Happiness organization has identified seven habits of happy people.

Happy people:

- build close relationships;
- care for others;
- engage in healthy, active lifestyles;
- embrace spirituality;
- practice positive thinking;
- embrace a hobby or activity; and
- identify strengths.

Attitude and Aging

A positive attitude about growing old throughout the lifespan can help you live longer, yet society constantly reinforces negative stereotypes of old age and aging. Such stereotypes include that aging adults are senile, frail, and cranky, and that growing old is generally something to be lamented. When primed with such negativity, you can be likely to conform to such stereotypes and live up to those low expectations, thus performing at lower functioning levels in old age. It is therefore important to recognize and value the contributions, accomplishments, and wisdom of senior adults. Such a societal change in attitude toward aging will affect both today's and tomorrow's seniors for the better. When armed with a sense of happiness and purpose, reinforced by a positive attitude, older adults are more apt to suppress negative thoughts and carry on as the competent, productive members of society that they are, regardless of age or ability.

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Everyone has a bad day, but in general, a positive attitude and happy outlook can help pull you through life's challenges. Having an upbeat and proactive outlook on life over time can also contribute to better health and optimal aging, including longevity.

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