

LIVING THE LONGEVITY LIFESTYLE

Submitted by Dr. Dale Johnson



A longevity lifestyle is how a person can live the most contented life possible, especially in later life or the last five to ten years of life. What happens in later life is that most people begin to experience the consequences of how they have cared for themselves personally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially, as well as experiencing the results of environment

factors throughout their lives. In a *CSA Journal* article Kathy O'Conner describes different pillars of the Longevity Lifestyle that include purpose, attitude, learning, advocacy, community, and health. (1)

A sense of purpose and belonging is essential to having a productive later life.

As humans, we have an essential need to know why we exist. Whether it is to get a good education, raise a solid family, excel in a career, expand our world-view, or serve as the wisdom keeper and elder of the family, we must have purpose.

While someone may know their purpose in life, their attitude toward it and life in general, will greatly impact their later-life. **A positive attitude and outlook on life is one of the key aspects affecting every life stage.** Be aware that negativity or such things as frequent criticism, cynical thoughts, denial, and despair that can result from illness, life events, personality problems, and substance abuse often affect our attitude towards life.

Another pillar to the Longevity Lifestyle is life-long learning. Anyone resisting change may find themselves at a deficit in the full participation in and independence of life. Technological wisdom, developing new hobbies or activities, and reading are some of the many ways in which to learn. The mental benefits of reading for older adults include enhanced memory, sharpening decision-making skills, potentially delaying the onset of dementia, reducing stress and anxiety, and sleeping better.

Self-advocacy is also a necessary pillar for making sure that your needs and wishes are followed in later-life as you have imagined. Self-advocacy means that you are able to know what you need, ask for it, and make sure it is carried out. It is an act of individuation, the process of forming a stable personality and sense of self. Think of having more than one plan because circumstances will likely change and you might have to make a different decision than initially planned.

As we age we have a great need for community because we lose close family members like grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles, older colleagues and community members. These losses affect life in many ways so it is imperative to nurture new relationship. There are many ways in which to do this like being active in a church group; having weekly “hot drink” groups; celebrating any special occasion such as holidays birthdays, anniversaries; monthly “come and go” parties; being on a board or committee; volunteering for any worthy cause such as mentoring youth and young adults; assisting those that need help; and so many other types of activities. Being involved in two or three large groups, a larger number of small groups, being active with neighbors, and weekly or daily involvement with just two to four people creates a good source of community and well being.

Some researchers believe that aging may actually be a modifiable risk factor, especially when it comes to health. (A moderating factor is one that positively or negatively affects the dependent factor or the decision-making process.) (A sudden unexpected disease or injury could be a negative modifiable physical health concern; whereas, an unexpected treatment and successful health recovery could be a positive modifiable health factor.) In addition to physical health, it is also important to be concerned about our mental health, spiritual health, and financial health.

Our mental health and what we think about the world greatly impact the way we think about our aging. Our spiritual health is how we think about our belonging in the world and the world around us. Our financial health is often what worries people the most. Later life is where we realize the culmination of all of our decisions and circumstances of the past that led us to the financial place where we are. **Longevity has created a great need for increased wealth to pay for the increased years that we are living.**

The Longevity Lifestyle can start at any age with habits, skills, and knowledge to last a lifetime. **Since aging may be a modifiable risk factor** - all adults, parents, grandparents, teachers, and others - can be mentors to youth, young adults, and other developmental ages to care for themselves personally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially. Like with any focus in life, **it is never too late to learn and grow, but the easier road is learning earlier in life.**

Best wishes for a Living the Longevity Lifestyle!

(1) O'Connor, Kelly. Living the Longevity Lifestyle. *CSA Journal*, Number 90, Volume 1, 2023, pp. 39-41.