

Healthy ageing - stay involved

Humans are social animals who need contact and intimacy with others to feel good about life. This is even more important after retirement, when the social contact that comes with being in the workforce is gone.

Factors such as low income, reduced physical mobility due to illness, or lack of access to transport can leave some people at home alone with nothing much to do. If this is the case, retirement may lead to social isolation, loneliness and depression. But there are lots of ways to stay involved in the wider community.

Ways to stay involved

Reach out to the immediate world around you for fun, a sense of achievement, social contact and mental stimulation. Some suggestions include:

- Improve your health
- Widen your circle of friends
- Volunteer in the classroom, community centre or organisation
- Become a mentor
- Get computer savvy
- Increase your physical activity.

Improve your health

For some seniors, health problems are a barrier to participation in the wider community. Suggestions include:

- Control existing health issues in close consultation with your doctor. Ask for self-help suggestions to better manage your condition.
- Maintain an appropriate and regular exercise routine. Walk or do strength training or water aerobics. Exercise improves physical health and boosts cognitive abilities such as memory and logic.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Don't smoke.
- Limit your alcohol intake.
- Turn off the television. Sitting in front of the TV for long periods every day tends to 'sedate' the body and mind.
- Stimulate your brain with activities such as reading, crossword puzzles or 'thinking' games such as Scrabble, Sudoku or Trivial Pursuit.
- Lively conversation is effective and fun exercise for the brain. Make an effort to be more sociable; for example, regularly invite family or friends over for a cup of tea and a chat.
- If you are feeling persistently depressed or sad, see your doctor.

Widen your circle of friends

It is rewarding to put time, effort and love into existing relationships, particularly relationships with family members. New friendships, however, can energise your life and open up opportunities for fresh experiences. For example, a new friend's passion for a particular hobby may inspire you to have a go. Ways to widen your circle of friends include:

- Ask the people you already know to introduce you to friends of theirs that you've heard of but never met.

- Check your local paper for clubs, associations and groups that get together in your neighbourhood. Join a club that attracts other people with similar interests to your own.
- Use this time to develop an interest or hobby you've wanted to try but didn't have the time while you were working and raising a family. Choose one of those hobbies and enrol in a local course.
- Further your education with a short course or university degree, and meet like-minded people at the same time.
- Ask at your local Centrelink office about your eligibility for the Pensioner Concession Card (if you haven't already). This card offers a range of savings, including reduced fares on public transport and at least one free rail trip in Victoria per year.
- Perform volunteer work in your local community. The added bonus of volunteering is the sense of personal satisfaction from making a meaningful contribution in your neighbourhood.

Volunteer

Many local councils, volunteer centres and community organisations are very interested in hearing from older people to support the work they are doing and to gain from the skills and knowledge you bring. Volunteering is a great way to get involved in your local community or to be involved in an area that interests you. Research shows there are many personal benefits that flow from volunteering, including:

- Increased confidence
- Sense of personal achievement and satisfaction
- Opportunities to learn new skills
- Feeling good about making a difference to others' lives
- Friendships.

Classroom help is always welcome

One volunteering opportunity is the local school or perhaps your grandchildren's school. Both primary and secondary schools appreciate assistance from unpaid helpers.

The support you could offer in the classroom includes helping students with curriculum activities such as reading, mathematics or art. Other volunteering opportunities include working in the library or making improvements to the school grounds. Students benefit a lot from seniors who volunteer at their schools.

Become a mentor

Retirement does not mean that your wealth of career knowledge has to lie idle. You could become a mentor, an experienced person who helps a less experienced person to realise their career goals. Many organisations across Australia offer mentoring programs. Contact the National Mentoring Association of Australia for more information.

Alternatively, you could contact your previous employer and offer your services as a mentor to one or more of their up-and-coming employees. Typically, a mentor spends a small but set amount of time (for example, two hours every fortnight) with the person they're mentoring to help 'show them the ropes'.

Mentoring can be particularly meaningful to retirees who had responsible or challenging jobs. Studies show that it can be difficult for these retirees to replace the 'cut and thrust' of their careers with leisure activities.

Get computer savvy

The Internet offers immediate and easy access to an unlimited number of opportunities. It is not something everyone wants to get involved in, but it is worth giving it a go – you might even enjoy it. You can:

- Keep in contact with friends via email
- Join chat-groups to meet new people
- Further your passion for a particular hobby or subject with an online club, and access like-minded people at the same time

- Find a wealth of information on any subject you care to name
- Take online courses.

The Internet is especially valuable to seniors with a physical disability that makes it difficult to leave the house. Suggestions on getting computer savvy include

- If you're not sure how to use a computer or the Internet, contact your local council for information on appropriate courses.
- Grandchildren are surprisingly adept with computers – ask for a lesson or two.
- If you don't have a computer, use the ones at your local library (they're free) or Internet cafe. Alternatively, tell family and friends that you're interested in owning a computer. You may inherit someone's system when they decide to upgrade.

Where to get help

- Your local council
- Your local Centrelink office
- Community groups
- Your local fitness centre
- Volunteering Victoria Tel. (03) 9642 5266 www.volunteeringvictoria.com.au
- National Mentoring Association of Australia Tel. (08) 9360 7847
- Seniors Information Victoria Tel. 1300 135 090

Things to remember

- Join a club that attracts other people with similar interests to your own.
- Become a mentor, which is an experienced person who helps a less experienced person to realise their career goals.
- Polish your computer and Internet skills with a formal course or lessons.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Council of The Ageing (COTA)

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