



News Column for Week of April 29, 2019

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Aging Successfully

In the year 2000, roughly 13% of the American population was 65 years or older. It's projected that by 2030 28% of Americans will be 65 and older. The most dramatic shift, however, is among people 85 and older. This age range is predicted to more than triple by the year 2040 -- likely outnumbering our school-aged children.

Those statistics are staggering. Obviously our life expectancy has lengthened greatly over the past century -- much due to societal and medical advances. There are, however, other key factors as to why some are more prone to live to grand old ages.

Researchers have discovered several clues to aging successfully. Setting goals is one clue. That old adage we are 'never too old' can still apply in older age. Sure, there may be challenges or obstacles, physical losses and limitations. However, compensations may be made that can still allow achieving goal. Taking on new strategies may be involved, which may include the aid of some sort of assistive technology or even asking for help. Setting new, reasonable goals are a way to keep a more positive attitude and creates momentum to continue looking forward in life.

A great example of not giving up on her goals is Kansas-born Nola Ochs. She took her first college course at Fort Hays State University (then known as Kansas State College) in 1930 — but didn't complete her degree until 2007, at the age of 95, becoming the nation's oldest college graduate.

Ralph Waldo Emerson's quote: "The first wealth is health," reveals another clue. More and more we are learning the importance good nutrition and continually staying active plays in living a longer healthier life. There are small pockets of populations around the world that have a larger than normal rate of centenarians – those that reach 100 years – within their communities. Researchers of those groups continually find their diets to be high in fruits and vegetables and a lifestyle that continues to include physical activity.

Finding purpose in life is one more clue. Among those centenarians that have been interviewed, most have continued to contribute in some way to their societies. They offer wisdom gained through their life experiences along the way to the next generations. They are giving back to their societies. Our volunteers in our own communities are local models.

Society's prescriptions in the United States tend to lean more toward negative attitudes when it comes to older adults. We need to break out of the mental set that makes us, as a society, think of our age first, and our identity second.

Robert Browning (1812-1889) was on target with his quote "Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be." His concept of "successful aging" provides the view that it is possible to enjoy our later years in a way that exceeds our expectations.

The month of May is National Older Adult Month. As we move into May, let us be more perceptive of not only how we can prepare now to age more successfully, but also be sensitive to those around us who have already reached those later stages of life. We can all achieve a balanced view of aging through thinking about the goals we select, the behaviors we engage in, and the strategies we can use to compensate when needed.

For more information on aging successfully, contact a Southwind Extension District office or go to www.southwind.ksu.edu.