

Senior Living



The Benefits of Music

Today's seniors are part of a generation that stirred up and transformed the music industry.

Today, the beats can have as big an impact on these seniors as when they were roaming Woodstock. From the very beginning of our lives, with lullabies sung to us by our mothers, music exerts influence.

MUSIC AND THE MIND

Listening to and focusing on soothing music can help a person enter a more relaxed state of physical and mental functioning, says Snyder. Once a person enters this state, they are better able to process things both physically and mentally, from medications to emotions. Improved sleep, diminished pain and improved recovery time were all observed.

MUSIC IS MEDICINE

Studies demonstrate that music promotes positive overall health.

Music also has been shown to increase mobility and coordination. Finnish researchers found that patients who listened to music after a stroke experienced a faster recovery of verbal skills.

Listening to music also can promote physical activity while dancing like (or pretending to be) Fred Astaire.



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MEMORY BENEFITS

Studies show that listening to music that corresponds with a significant time, place or event for the listener stimulates the brain's memory maker, known to the professionals as the medial prefrontal cortex. Music therapy for

dementia patients has proven to help stimulate this type of brain activity.

STRESS REDUCER

Music also can help relax seniors when they become agitated. Music has been shown to improve relaxation and

boost esteem, while reducing tension and anxiety. The playing of a personally meaningful song from youth can help a senior who is agitated.

INTEGRATE MUSIC INTO LIVING

It's easier today than ever to

bring music of today and yesteryear into the living room. Any song is at our fingertips. Thank you, internet!

Create a personalized playlist, go to a concert or attend a high school football game to hear the band, or even play your own instrument.

Better Health with Tai Chi

Tai chi is a form of meditative exercise consisting of a series of 19 movements and one pose.

It's a godsend for many seniors, who employ its circular, slow-moving forms as an aid to the mind and body.

MEDITATION AND MEDICATION IN MOTION

In a study conducted by Harvard Medical School, tai chi was found to offer a number of benefits, in addition to preventing falls and reducing the effects of arthritis. The practice of tai chi has been shown to be helpful for a number of medical conditions, including low bone density, heart disease, hypertension, Parkinson's disease, sleep disorders and stroke. It doesn't end there, however. Tai chi has also shown to be helpful in increasing strength, improving mobility, bettering flexibility, boosting the immune system and losing weight by getting in touch with hunger cues.

ORIGINS

Tai chi is thought to have been developed in the 13th century by a monk named Zhang Sanfeng. He was inspired to create the discipline after watching a fight between a crane and a snake. That's right, it began as a martial art also known as tai chi



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chuan. "Tai chi" translates to "supreme ultimate," and "chuan" means "fist." Today, it's used for anything but a form a self-defense.

THE BASICS

There are a number of styles of tai chi, but all involve

a choreographed series of movements (also known as postures) called a form or a set. Each set has a certain number of postures. The movements are slow and deliberate. Many say it can feel a bit like dancing. Tai chi movements involve shifting

your weight from one foot to another.

All of the movements are designed to create an awareness of how your feet are connected to the earth. Throughout a set, you are often slightly crouched, with your knees flexed. This pos-

ture helps to strengthen your glutes and leg muscles, which are important muscles for balance.

It's also important to keep your back as straight possible. Over time, this postural awareness can help improve your posture in everyday life.

Vitamin D and Nutrition

“The sun,” said Henry Ward Beecher, the acclaimed clergyman and social reformer, “does not shine for a few trees and flowers, but for the wide world’s joy.”

Sunshine also is the giver of the essential vitamin D, but Mother Nature provides other natural sources.

WHY DO SENIORS NEED IT?

Many older adults don’t get enough vitamin D, leading to symptoms of vitamin D deficiency, including bone softening, nausea, cognitive difficulties and frailty. Moreover, studies indicate that low vitamin D concentrations might promote the pathogenesis of Type 1 diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, loss of muscle tissue, cancer and other diseases. The recommended daily dose of vitamin D for seniors is 600 IU for those under 71 and 800 IU for those 71 and older.

LINK TO DEPRESSION

The Journals of Gerontology published a study conducted by researchers Cesar de Oliveira Vasant Hirani and Jane P. Biddulph which showed a demonstrated link between low vitamin D levels and elevated depressive symptoms, suggesting that vitamin D deficiency might be a risk factor

for late-life depression, particularly among women.

VITAMIN D HAS SOME BITE

Older adults are faced with the challenges of gum disease and tooth decay. Vitamin D provides a strong defense. In a study of 67 dental patients, according to ScienceDirect,

those with higher vitamin D levels exhibited a lower likelihood of contracting oral health diseases, the most prominent cause of senior tooth decay and loss. This recent research has been reaffirmed by many other studies, all of which note the link between vitamin D and the body’s ability to absorb calcium.

MOTHER EARTH GIVETH VITAMIN D

Sunshine is a fantastic source of natural vitamin D, though the sun comes with its own risk factor. Nonetheless, an afternoon walk could kill two birds with one stone. One tablespoon of cod liver oil supplements 170% of daily vitamin D recommendations.

Mushrooms are another good source. Four or five sliced white mushrooms make up half of daily vitamin D recommendations. Three ounces of cooked salmon account for more than 80% of necessary vitamin D. Milk is chock full of it, containing 20% of the daily recommended vitamin D value.





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Seniors and Social Media

Social media channels are more and more being occupied by seniors, who are seeing benefits.

That's not something you can always say about social media, but used properly there is good to be had.

STAYING CONNECTED

Facebook has been a good thing for seniors, acting as a catalyst for increasing connectedness, according to a study published by Penn State. Analysis revealed that the popular social media forum effectively facilitates connectedness to loved ones

who have moved away, particularly for those seniors with decreased mobility.

Lack of participation in activities can increase feelings of loneliness as well as a decrease in morale and life satisfaction. Isolated seniors engaged on Facebook showed far less incidences of these issues.

LEARNING AND GROWING

In addition to maintaining ties with friends and relatives, one study found that simply learning the technology and finding their way around were in itself a form of social support for seniors that provided opportunities to strengthen the brains of older adults.

FINDING NEW FRIENDS

Seniors aren't only using social media to keep in touch, they're also using it to meet new friends through online dating sites, which provides a wide range of potential romance. These are places that also appear to increase longevity and psychological and emotional well-being. A study conducted by Carnegie Mellon University examined the effect of online socialization on preventing illness. Healthy volunteers in the study with more social connections were less likely to catch a cold than socially isolated participants. Stress hormones weaken the body's infection fighting response, but social interaction can diffuse stress.

STAYING INVOLVED VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media also keeps seniors educated and engaged in their community. Social media has been a prolific conveyor of raising awareness about important issues to the nation, state or town regarding current events, scientific breakthroughs or even an investment or business opportunity.

Being active on social media helps seniors stay involved with political and civic movements important to their generation as well as the current generation.

Another plus: There's a place on social media to interact and interject ideas and share life experiences.

Sun Protection and Skin Care

Seniors can be especially vulnerable to skin damage from the sun.

Too much sun exposure can increase the likelihood of older adults developing skin cancer or melanoma. It's an issue that is gathering more importance for seniors who are living longer than ever.

WHAT TO BUY

Make sure you're using the right stuff. That is, a sun protection cream or salve that offers protection from UVA and UVB rays with a sun protection factor of 30 or above. Apply sunscreen about half an hour before exposure and reapply throughout the day.

DRESS FOR IT

Dermatologists recommend sunscreen, of course, but also emphasize covering up as much exposed skin as possible. Light-colored and light-weight fabrics allow seniors to cover up their skin while staying cool and comfortable.

A wide-brimmed hat is more than useful, too, protecting the scalp and shading the face.

DON'T FORGET THE EYES

The National Institutes of Health estimates that 20% of cataracts cases are caused by extended UV exposure. Deploy dark-colored sunglasses for the job.

USE COMMON SENSE



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Always look for shade to stay out of the sun and alleviate the risks of heat stress and overexertion.

If you're on the golf course and have to wait for the group in front of you, find a tree to sit or stand under. Every little bit helps. Earlier is better, too.

The sun's rays are typically most severe between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. The most common symptoms of heat stress include fatigue, dizziness, nausea, cramps and headaches. More severe symptoms include mental confusion, flushed skin and a high heart

rate. The National Institutes of Health recommends that these latter symptoms should be greeted with immediate medical attention.

REDUCE YOUR CANCER RISK

People who reach the age

of 65 can expect to live, on average, two more decades. This means that efforts to improve the use of sun protection and reduce sunburn among older adults would likely help to reduce skin cancer risk in later decades of life.

Indoor Herb Garden

Moving dirt, bending down to dig, weed or plant, or even watering can all present a risk of injury for seniors in the physically taxing avocation of outdoor gardening.

The remedy: the indoor herb gardening.

IT'S GOOD FOR YOU

Indoor gardeners can reap all the health benefits of gardening indoors, including stress reduction and even lower blood pressure. Indoor gardens, botanists tell us, can actually improve the air quality of your home.

Plants can get rid of harmful chemicals and increase oxygen levels! It might be an indoor garden, but focusing on the cultivation of a small, dependent life form also provides a desperately needed ingredient for older adult living — a purpose.

EMBRACE THE HERB

It's hard to put a value on herbs, but common and essential uses include aromatherapy, medicinal, and as delicious flavorings in foods. Oh, and for the beverage that might include a health-giving alcoholic spirit. Some herbs even deliver cancer-fighting antioxidants and nutrients. Check with your doctor first to make sure your herbs don't interfere with any medications.



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ESSENTIAL HERBS

Consider these essential herbs for your garden. Oh, holy basil. This magician can help fight bronchitis, earaches and the flu. Give it plenty of water and full sun. Mint is a blessing to the gastrointestinal tract.

Italians like to say that two drops of wine is as good as an apple a day for keeping the doctor away. So, too, is oregano, rich in antioxidants as well as iron, manganese and Omega-3s. And it smells good. Pungent rosemary has anti-

bacterial properties, and thyme has been shown to relieve respiratory infections and bacterial resistance to drugs.

LIGHT UP YOUR LIFE

Even the grow lights, essen-

tial to mimicking the light the sun produces to stimulate growth, could have health benefits for seniors who spend a long time indoors. The body needs sunlight and if you don't get enough it can affect your mood and health.



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Sports Trends: Pickleball

The founding fathers of the phenomenon of pickleball are actually probably seniors.

It's catching on across demographic fields, but seniors were on the cutting edge of this hybrid racket sport that combines elements of tennis, table tennis and badminton. Harvard Medical School has studied the benefits of the sport.

THE SETTING

Pickleball is played on a small court similar to a badminton court that looks like the top of a table tennis table. Many communities adapt a ten-

nis court to fit the 20 foot by 40 foot pickleball court dimensions. The net is a tad shorter than a net on a tennis court. The ball is like a Whiffle ball, with holes. Paddles are a bit bigger than those used for table tennis. Equipment is available on Amazon or your local sporting goods store.

BENEFITS

Pickleball doesn't require the exertion of tennis, making it easier on all the joints. It's fast paced and good for

hand-eye coordination and challenges players to think on their feet. Quick lateral movement boosts balance. The game demands use of leg, core, arm and shoulder muscles, and it's a weight-bearing activity, which is good for your bones.

SOCIAL ADVANTAGES

The game doubles as a social event. Plus, the court is small, keeping all the players (you can play singles or doubles) in close proximity.

"Social networking and the number and quality of social connections are emerging as huge determiners of health and longevity, said Dr. Aaron

Baggish, director of the Cardiovascular Performance Program at Harvard-affiliated Massachusetts General Hospital. "Particularly for older people who might tend to be isolated, this is a great way to get out into the community and enjoy the camaraderie of a fun sport."

THERE IS A DRAWBACK

Pickleball isn't an adequate aerobic workout. It won't provide the same cardiovascular benefits as 30 minutes of jogging, Baggish said.

Pickleball is best used as a complement to a well-rounded exercise regimen.