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Live With a Longevity Mindset By Paying Attention to These Key Health Factors

NATIONAL SENIOR GAMES ATHLETES AND EXPERTS EXPLAIN WHAT YOU CAN DO TO LIVE YOUR BEST, LONG LIFE—ON AND OFF THE BIKE.

By Jennifer Acker / Published Aug 31, 2023 / Bicycling.com



Tori Krout

It's no secret that your [fitness](#) is important to keep cranking out the miles month after month, and year after year. Staying in top cycling condition plays a key role in your [endurance](#) and [speed](#) gains—and it can even help you live longer. In fact, [major](#)

[research](#) confirms that those who stay physically active, getting at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity exercise each week (or more), have a lower risk of early mortality compared to their more sedentary counterparts.

While you're making good on your health by staying physically active with cycling, it's also important to pay attention to other factors that play a role in longevity, like [diet](#) and [mental health](#) (to name a few). Plus, not only do these factors help you live longer, but they also help you live *well*.

To help you (no matter your age!) get into a longevity mindset—meaning that you're keeping in mind the many facets of a healthy lifestyle and approaching life with the long game in mind—we chatted with [National Senior Games](#) athletes and experts to get their best advice on how to age well and live life to the fullest, well into your golden years.

Get Regular Checkups and Screenings

Staying on top of your health from a younger age is so important as it can stave off problems later in life, says Michael Danielewicz, M.D., who specializes in geriatric medicine at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia. He says to think of aging as not only [living longer](#), but also living better.

For many, living better can equate to fewer trips to the doctor in your senior years. To minimize those doctor visits, it's important to stay current with your health screenings when you do go, Danielewicz says. For example, he recommends colonoscopy screenings beginning at age 45, along with cervical cancer screenings beginning at 25 years old, as they are both common, preventable cancers.

It's also important to follow up with a primary care doctor on a routine basis to keep tabs on your [cholesterol](#) and hemoglobin A1C (which is a marker of [diabetes](#) or insulin resistance). "These are all really basic things that can be done within the context of a normal visit, and can help us get ahead of or even prevent issues down the line," Danielewicz says.

As noted by the [CDC](#), aging increases the risk for chronic disease, like [heart disease](#), [high blood pressure](#), type 2 [diabetes](#), [dementia](#), and [cancer](#). "These are all things that I encourage folks to be proactive about, both as they get older and also when they're younger," Danielewicz says. Think of your annual checkups as an investment in your future self and make them a priority on your calendar.



Mark McCarthy, senior games cyclist
Tori Krout

Pay Attention to Changes in Your Mobility

Changes in [mobility](#), like no longer being able to easily accomplish daily tasks, occurs a lot in older patients, Danielewicz says. In order to minimize mobility issues in your senior years, it's smart to have a solid [fitness base](#). This means not only including cardio exercise in your schedule leading up to and through your golden years, but also regular [strength training](#) and [stretching](#), all of which make the aging process easier. You're essentially protecting your strength, [balance](#), and [endurance](#) when training your body in these ways, which is vital for seniors.

Too often, older patients believe changes to their bodies are just a part of normal aging, Danielewicz says, but that's doesn't have to be the case.

Living with that longevity mindset means taking note of physical changes you might experience, like decreased stamina when you're out on a ride or trouble completing tasks, like tying your shoes, that you once could do with ease. When you do notice these changes, let your doctor know. "I am quite possibly the biggest fan of physical and occupational therapy for regaining or retaining function," Danielewicz says.

"Physical therapy has really helped me survive," adds [Ellen Jaffejones](#), 70, National Senior Games track athlete, RRCA-certified run coach, personal trainer, and author of six cookbooks.

Jaffejones says when she first wakes up in the [morning](#), she does a body scan from head to toe to see if anything feels different or uncomfortable. This is also an opportunity to work out the kinks with either self [massage](#) or [stretching](#), Jaffejones says. When that doesn't work, the Sarasota, Florida-based runner checks in with her physical therapist.

The more in-tune you are with changes in your mobility and physical body, the better you can stay on top of any nagging issues that might sneak up on you.

Prioritize Socializing for Your Mental Health

National Senior Games cycling athlete Mark McCarthy, 74, of Rochester, New York looks forward to racing with his local club every Tuesday evening from April through September. He competes against riders half his age, perhaps to his benefit when competing in the senior cycling games. In 2023, McCarthy placed fourth in the 5K cycling time trials, took gold in the 10K time trial, and bronze in the 40K road race.

[Older adults](#) are at a greater risk of isolation and loneliness, which can lead to worse health outcomes, Danielewicz says. According to the [National Institute of Aging](#) an estimated one in four adults over the age of 65 experience social isolation. According to a nine-year study published in the [Journal of the American Geriatrics Society](#) in 2023, older adults who are isolated have an increased risk of developing dementia, compared to those who are not isolated.

The pandemic especially proved challenging for many seniors who found themselves alone and vulnerable, which can lead to [mental health](#) struggles. That's why Danielewicz encourages seniors to engage with their community as much as they feel comfortable.

In addition to joining a cycling club, consider connecting with [Silver Sneakers](#), a health and fitness program designed for adults 65-plus that's included with many medicare advantage plans. Silver Sneakers provides access to thousands of gyms across the country, where you can connect with your community.

Recently, primary care doctors have started addressing [mental health](#) concerns with patients more regularly and it's something everyone (including seniors) shouldn't be afraid to bring up in their appointments. "We as a community [of doctors] care as much about mental health as we do about physical health," Danielewicz says. It's important for patients to feel comfortable and affirmed in their decision to seek care, including for mental health symptoms, he adds.

Adopt a Resilient Mindset

You don't have to be in perfect health to live a healthy lifestyle. National Senior Games cyclist Mike Adsit, 73, of Plymouth, Michigan is proof of that. Adsit is a four-time, 22-year cancer survivor. It was during his first cancer diagnosis of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in 2001 that Adsit knew he'd need to adopt a resilient mindset in order to mentally recover from cancer.



Mike Adsit, four-time cancer survivor and senior games athlete

Tori Krout

During six months of [chemotherapy](#), he asked himself what he wanted his life to look like post cancer, and used it as an opportunity to reset. That's when he became more serious about cycling and began volunteering with the Livestrong Foundation. Today, Adsit coaches cyclists through [GetSetUp](#), a company that provides services to seniors. He also mentors cancer patients and survivors.

Adsit also lives by achievable goals, which keeps his fitness consistent and provides a stable foundation for his physical health. Those achievable goals continue to keep Adsit [pedaling](#) and fit, so when his [cancer](#) returned for the third time in 2011 and he needed to undergo a high-risk stem-cell transplant, his body was able to handle it. "Those intermediate years when I developed bicycle fitness and I had a coach and was training 10 to 12 hours a week and competing, I had a physical fitness foundation that really pushed me through the whole treatment of a stem-cell transplant," he says.

Try Different Forms of Exercise

In order to avoid overuse [injuries](#), [burnout](#), and engage different [muscles](#), it's important to try various forms of exercise. McCarthy, a former professional racquetball player and collegiate wrestler, got into cycling as a result of [hip injuries](#). After two hip replacements (23 years ago), his doctor advised him to either take up swimming or cycling, as they wouldn't be as taxing on his hips as tennis and racquetball.

Outside of his 10 to 12 hours of cycling a week, Adsit also walks two to three hours a week and does weekly [weight-training](#) sessions to maintain a well-balanced approach to fitness.

When not running, Jaffejones loves [Pilates](#), and suggests mat Pilates (rather than reformer) for those just starting out.

Eat Real Food, Organic When Possible

“Every [diet](#) plan has to be individualized,” Danielecwiz says, but some general rules also apply to healthy eating. He recommends avoiding ultra-processed foods and eating more [fruits and vegetables](#). A few examples of [ultra-processed foods](#) include pre-packaged baked goods, mass-produced breads, microwave-ready meals, bacon, and sausage.

Research shows that eating ultra-processed foods can seriously affect your health. A large cohort [study](#) published in *BMJ* followed more than 100,000 French adults’ dietary records for more than five years and discovered those who ate more ultra-processed foods had higher risks for cardiovascular disease and coronary heart disease. These foods have also been linked to [dementia](#) and [cancer](#).

Consider local seasonal food sources to help you find healthier options. For example, McCarthy buys most of his [meat](#), produce, and [eggs](#) from a farm two miles away from his home and adheres to a diet of low sugars and chemicals. “If it’s white I don’t eat it—like white rice and white flour,” he says.



Ellen Jaffejones (pictured second from right), senior games athlete

Tori Krout

Adsit, who retired from the organic farming industry, says he normally eats [organic](#). “I’m a super big advocate of organic foods or understanding the transparency of the foods you eat because a lot of this stuff in the system is just loaded with chemicals,” he says.

As many seniors are on a fixed income, eating well can get costly quickly. Jaffejones suggests growing your own garden or joining a CSA (community supported agriculture), not only for the fresh local produce options, but community engagement as well. With some CSAs, volunteers can even get produce for free. Jaffejones, a vegan, says her diet of [beans](#), [grains](#), and greens, works well to sustain her in the seven events she recently competed in at the senior track and field games.

Consider Finding a Doctor in Geriatric Medicine as You Age

Geriatric medicine is focused on not just [longevity](#), but aging well. Danielewicz says a common framework used to approach geriatric medicine are the four Ms:

Mobility: assessing a patient's physical functioning

Mentation: examining the way patients are thinking, and the way their memory is functioning

Medication: geriatric medicine will approach medication with a critical eye making sure the patient is only on the medication they need to take

Matters: figuring out what matters most to the patient at that time

While any physician can approach a patient's healthcare with this framework, Danielewicz says it's especially important in geriatric medicine. You can find specialists in your region at the [American Geriatrics Society](#).

See next week, until then....

Make Every Ride Epic,

Darryl