

Motivation Might Be the Key to Healthy Aging

By [Claire Gillespie](#) | Published on October 28, 2021 **NEW**

✓ Fact checked by [Aaron Johnson](#)

Key Takeaways

- A recent journal supplement focused on the importance of motivation for healthy aging.
- Specifically, goal-setting is key to fulfilling our potential into old age.
- Experts believe motivation boosts mental health, fosters creativity, encourages promotes healthy lifestyle choices, and spreads compassion.

Love it or loathe it, aging is an unavoidable part of life for all of us. So it's no surprise that scientists are fascinated by how we age—and how we can make it a more fulfilling experience.

A new supplemental issue to *The Journals of Gerontology, Series B*, says motivation is a key part of healthy aging. Funded by the Swiss foundation Velux Stiftung the supplement consists of nine articles addressing one or more components of a motivational model of [healthy aging](#).

"It is our hope that it inspires both strands of research and, with this, ultimately will make a contribution to addressing the question how people can age healthily and fulfill their potential well into old and very old age," wrote the authors.

The Importance of Healthy Aging

Considering the increase in old and very old adults, understanding factors that contribute to healthy aging is essential for societies as well as individuals, says [Alexandra M. Freund](#), PhD, professor of psychology at University of Zurich and lead guest author for the supplemental issue. "We all hope to live well into old age in a way that fosters not only our [psychological well-being](#) but allows us to continue living meaningful lives and to pursue our goals," she adds.



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Dr. Freund says goals are key to healthy aging. “Goals are the states people deem personally desirable and want to achieve,” she explains. “They provide direction and meaning, they motivate us to acquire new skills or maintain functioning, and give us a sense of agency and control to shape our lives according to our values.”

It’s not only the setting and pursuit of goals that are important, Dr. Freund notes. For healthy aging, it’s also paramount to disengage from goals that no longer match our personal opportunities and constraints, as defined by our culture, societal structures and organizations, relationships, and the technology that’s available to us.

Related: [Self-Improvement Goal Setting Tips](#)

The Many Benefits of Motivation

Leela R. Magavi, MD, psychiatrist and Regional Medical Director for [Community Psychiatry](#) and [MindPath Care Centers](#), evaluates many geriatric individuals who say they feel best about themselves when they remain goal-oriented each day, and feel pride when they complete something independently for themselves or their families.

Dr. Magavi believes motivation contributes to a healthy aging process for several reasons. Firstly, it can be a tool to combat the inevitable [stress of life](#). It also fosters creativity and improves cognition, and subsequently leads to success in all areas of life, including relationships and work performance. It helps to cultivate a stronger sense of self, which often leads to improved physical health and wellbeing.

"Motivated individuals tend to eat more healthy, balanced meals and exercise more frequently," Dr. Magavi adds. But most importantly, motivation allows us to feel human and connected to one another. "Many people question the purpose of life and feel lost and helpless without motivation," Dr. Magavi says. "Motivation allows us to spread compassion and positivity, and concurrently, attract more positive, motivated people."

Related: [How to Accentuate Positive Aspects and Minimize the Negative](#)

Motivation Is Age-Dependent

Psychologist [Sheila Forman](#), PhD points out that motivation is age-dependent. "What motivated us when we were 20 is unlikely to motivate us at age 50," she says. "But staying motivated throughout our lifespan is important for our quality of life."



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It was developmental psychologist Erik Erikson who outlined the series of [stages of psychosocial development](#) during a person's lifetime, and postulated that we enter the final stage (integrity versus despair) at around age 65.

"These issues can be seen as a description of what motivates us at each stage in life," explains Dr. Forman. For example, when we are in our 20s the issue we face is intimacy vs. isolation which motivates us to find and build healthy relationships or we end up alone. By age 50, the issue is generativity vs. stagnation which motivates us to be successful in our work (professional or volunteer) or we end up bored and listless.

The experts agree that throughout our lives, motivation helps us to stay engaged and feel productive and worthwhile—all of which are valuable for strong mental health.

Related: [How People Develop a Sense of Generativity vs Stagnation](#)

Knowing What Motivates You

While motivation is a key tool for setting and achieving goals, it looks different for everyone. [Intrinsic \(internal\) motivation](#) comes from within and is based on your own values and desires. "This can often be a very powerful form of motivation," Dr. Forman says. On the other hand, extrinsic (external) motivation comes from outside you, for instance a paycheck or end-of-year bonus. "Knowing what motivates you and how to activate your motivation will help you set and achieve your goals," says Dr. Forman.

Being motivated from a young age can set you up for future well-being. "Good, healthy habits established earlier in life will provide pay-offs later in life," Dr. Forman says. "For example, a person who starts exercising at an early age is more likely to continue exercising throughout her life, and a person who develops the habit of reading every day will help their brain maintain strong cognitive functioning as the years go by."

What This Means For You

If you feel like your life lacks motivation, start with the basics—going for a mindful walk or engaging in some form of physical activity to release endorphins and boost your mood.

Try writing gratitude letters, outlining all the things you love about yourself and the things you have achieved. It's normal to feel lonely or sad at times, and this is when listing things you're thankful for (physically, emotionally, and spiritually) may be extremely therapeutic.

Read Next: [Coping With Death and Loss of Loved Ones as You Get Older](#)

7 Sources

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