

3 TIPS TO STAY MENTALLY SHARP IN RETIREMENT

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At the age of 80, Regina, Saskatchewan's Carol Lafayette-Boyd was named World Masters Athlete of the Year in 2022. Although she'd competed in track and field while attending high school, she spent her working life helping others, first as a nurse and then later as a social worker. When she was 50, she participated in a masters track meet (for those aged 35 and older), a decision that kick-started a late-stage career in athletics.

While your retirement plans might not include sprinting like Lafayette-Boyd, her story offers a valuable lesson: age is not a barrier to accomplishing great things. Or, as she told CTV News: "It doesn't matter how well you do or don't do. If you just get out there and keep fit and healthy, that's what's important."

So how do you stay sharp as you age? The first step is to stay active—physically, mentally and socially—and there are many ways to do so. Dr. David Brown, CIBC's Corporate Medical Director points out: "Simple activities such as walking regularly several times each week are surprisingly effective (no need for marathons)." Let's take a closer look at how exercise, diet, and cognitive stimulation can keep you sharp.

Physical activity

You might be wondering what physical activity is doing in an article about maintaining cognitive health in retirement, but the truth is, the two are closely linked. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, exercise boosts your mood by releasing feel-good endorphins while [also supporting your brain function](#). Regular exercise can reduce depression, anxiety and stress, and enhance mental acuity and self-esteem.

“Picking up good habits as we move through life is very important,” emphasizes Dr. Brown. “There are periods when things get away from us—just too many competing interests—and we lose sight of our own needs. So, finding a way to be active, connected and thoughtful is important. I personally picked a theme—to be more active. I have followed that plan for the past 15 years. As a result, I now have friends who like the activities that I enjoy, making it not another chore or thing on the to-do list, but something that happens naturally. And it’s fun!”

Consider taking up an active hobby like tai chi, golf or pickleball to make staying active more fun and motivating.

Brain activity

Just as you need to work out your body, you also need to exercise your mind. Passive activities, like watching television, are perfectly fine occasional past-times but your brain will thank you for adding a healthy dose of active projects. “Playing games, creating art and reading are very effective,” Dr. Brown suggests.

Social interaction is also crucial to your well-being. In fact, isolation can negatively impact both your mental and physical health. However, the damage caused by loneliness is [reversible](#) so prioritize staying connected with friends and family.

“I think that this aspect is sadly often overlooked,” he says. “We are social creatures so staying connected with people matters. Loneliness steals cognition at a considerable rate. Discussion with others keeps the mind flowing and keeps us creative. Also, a sense of purpose helps us get the most out of life.”

Equally important for an active mind is proper rest. As Dr. Brown notes, “In recent years, study after study has pointed to the benefits of good sleep in protecting cognition, both day-to-day and in the longer term.”

Healthy eating

We know healthy food is good for your body, but did you know it also benefits your brain? According to the Alzheimer Society of Canada, a sustained nutritious diet can help you maintain your cognitive functions and slow their decline.

In general, eating unprocessed foods is the better option. The food supplements we see advertised are questionable but a diet rich in veggies and lighter proteins such as chicken or fish is effective,” explains Dr. Brown.

Retirement is a time for you to refocus, explore new opportunities and spend more time with loved ones. Maintaining your cognitive health allows you to take full advantage of this new chapter of life.

I’m here to help you reach your retirement goals. Let’s connect and discuss how you can realize them.