

# 6 Ways to Stay Healthier than Your Parents



Baby boomers, known for being the “healthiest” generation, are actually in worse overall health than their parents, according to researchers at the West Virginia University School of Medicine. Just one in 10 report being in excellent health, compared to one-third of their parents.

“Baby boomers need to keep themselves healthy, both to be able to enjoy their grandchildren and children, but to keep care of their aging parents,” said Dr. Dana E. King, the study’s lead author and chairman of the West Virginia University Department of Family Medicine in Morgantown, WV. “It’s not too late. Start now.”

Here are six ways to stay healthier than your parents—especially when they might need you the most.

1. **Eat those Brussels sprouts (and more).** Pay closer attention to your weight, no matter if you look thin or obese. Eat five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, King recommends. Embracing this guideline can ward off stroke, diabetes and heart disease, as well as keep blood pressure low and other illnesses at bay. Start out by eating an apple or grapefruit at breakfast, and you’ll be on your way to reaching the daily five servings goal, and even meeting new U.S. government guidelines that recommend 7 to 13 cups of veggies and fruits daily.

2. **Hit the sidewalk, park, gym, or fitness center.** Exchange a sedentary lifestyle for a bit of activity to help you avoid higher levels of hypertension and diabetes, and elevated rates of cholesterol than your parents. Exercise 25 minutes a day, five times a week, King recommends, adding that exercise and eating are part of his “five keep you alive plan.” If you’re a couch potato, start small, by walking 10 or 15 minutes a day, and work your way up to 20 or 30 minutes.

3. **Take that final puff.** If you have been promising to quit smoking for years, conquer that vice. Call 800-QUIT-NOW to talk to a coach who can create a plan to help you stop smoking, or join a smoking cessation program in your town. In a matter of months, your risk of complications from smoking can decrease, King says.

4. **Turn off the devices.** Being a tech-savvy baby boomer may seem hip to your grandkids, but spending too much time on those devices could deprive you of essential sleep. Sleep problems worsen as people age, studies find, and the glare of a computer or smartphone screen doesn't help folks get shut-eye, either. Turn off your cell phone, laptop, tablet, or other digital devices an hour before you want to fall asleep. Once you're under the covers, resist the desire to check email or Facebook again and go to sleep.

5. **Do the stretch test.** With each birthday, muscles, bones, and ligaments that are not used to working can get harder to move. Take this test: Simply raise your arms over your head. If you're spending most of the day typing on your computer or activities such as doing the dishes or clicking the remote, raising your arms and straightening them could be uncomfortable. Start to do simple stretches for your arms, legs and back. You may not be able to do cartwheels with your grandchildren, but daily stretches can help you remain limber.

6. **Build your strength.** Once you're walking, biking or jogging regularly, increase your fitness level by adding strength training into the mix. Some fitness clubs offer workout programs specifically for baby boomers, and personal trainers can modify exercises for your needs. Soon enough, you'll be feeling healthier and more prepared to care for your aging parents.

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