

K-State Research & Extension News for June, 2023

SMILE BIG

Submitted by Kathy Goul, Family & Consumer Science Agent

A smile or words of encouragement may seem like small things, but they add up! When we live life to the fullest, looking for the silver lining in all things, those smiles and words of encouragement can add up in a big way. We know from research that having a positive outlook on aging actually adds 7 ½ years to our life. If you have a positive outlook, you're able to embrace aging – and reap the rewards!

To keep us focused on the positive, Dr. Erin Yelland, as specialist on aging with K-State Research & Extension, has created an acronym that supports the belief that living with positivity is the healthy plan for aging well. She encourages us to SMILE BIG!

(S) Successful aging requires practicing positivity. If we have a positive attitude, we are more likely to make changes and implement healthy behaviors into our lives that are going to help us to be successful as we age.

(M) Manage our expectations. We are not always going to be at the pinnacle of healthy aging, and that's okay. We need to make our expectations something that are attainable. Set goals for yourself and take control of the steps needed to achieve them.

(I) Interact with positivity. Research shows that when you interact with positive people and places, you're more likely to embrace positivity as well. Spend time with family and friends who share this same outlook on life and plan activities that bring you joy.

(L) Looking for positives. We know that bad things happen sometimes, but when you take the time to truly reflect, many times we can find something positive that occurred. Although it might not feel like it at the time, most negative situations contain a learning experience. If we are going through the pain and discomfort of dealing with a negative situation, we can take the opportunity to learn something from it too.

(E) Escaping ageism. Make it a priority to escape stereotypes associated with aging. Your age does not define who you are. Gone are the days where older people are supposed to “have gray hair, sit in a rocking chair, knit and stay home”. Today's older adults remain active, socially connected and engaged in their communities.

(B) Being healthy. There are a lot of healthy behaviors that we should be doing, but we don't always do them. Eating healthy, exercising regularly and taking care of our brain all lead to successful aging. Adding colorful fruits & vegetables to our plates, along with lean protein and whole grains is a great start! If you are not currently active – strive for 30 minutes of movement each day.

(I) “I Can” approach. Instead of saying “I can't do this or that anymore”, take the “I Can” approach. For example, “I can utilize a cane that will help me move around more safely” vs. “I can't get out and about as much as I used to”.

(G) Give yourself grace. Sometimes we are going to mess up or have a bad day. We need to give ourselves grace so we're not beating ourselves down when we don't always embrace positivity. It is okay to not be okay.

My challenge to you today is to get out there, smile big and work to add those 7 ½ years to your life, as well as others! Life is all about choices, and attitude does make a difference.

Source: Erin Yelland, PhD, Associate Professor and Extension Specialist, Kansas State University. For more information on aging well, contact Kathy Goul at 913-294-4306 or via email at kgoul@ksu.edu.