There is a growing body of research exploring the relationship between aging and creativity. Creativity influences your mind and body. It fosters communication and expression that is both healing and embraces the wholeness inherent in each of us. Creative activities provide you with opportunities to heal and continue to grow.
Creative Expression and Aging

The arts stir us in countless ways. They affect your emotions. They can be a conduit for looking within. They can help you communicate with others to express your hopes, fears or grief. Even the seemingly simple act of coloring in an adult coloring book can help release tension and anxiety.

Creative outlets offer opportunities for you to build the resilience and ability to adapt to changes you will experience as you grow older. By incorporating creativity into your life as you age, you can gain a sense of control over how your body and mind are changing.

Using your creative skills can provide an opportunity to do something that can benefit others such as knitting a hat for a newborn or building a birdhouse. This can help you look toward your future with meaning and purpose.

Creativity and Cognitive Health

Research on creativity and aging demonstrates the positive impact of the arts on health and illness, including using creativity to work your mind. Creativity promotes brain plasticity, so art is your natural ally as you grow older. When your brain is challenged through your activities and your surroundings, the formation of new synapses (contact points) occurs. So engaging in new experiences, like art, can enhance your brain connections.

You can protect and enhance your brain by exploring your creative potential. The best arts that promote brain health are those involving physical activity and movement, as well as mental challenge and stimulation. Challenging creative activities that require you to acquire and refine new skills also create a stimulating environment for your brain. When combined with social interaction you have a potent recipe for healthy aging.

Cognitive research shows we maintain our capacity for creative expression as we age. Even if memory is diminishing, the capacity for imagination is still there. Creativity can provide a valuable means of communication and connection between those with mild cognitive impairment or dementia and their loved ones.

Enhancing Your Quality of Life

Nearly all of us will be managing at least one chronic medical condition after the age of 65. Reducing stress in your daily life is a vital part of your self-care plan as you age because research suggests stress can lead to symptom flare-ups for many chronic conditions.

Having creative outlets are a must for your stress-reduction plan. Writing in a journal, painting, making pottery or doing needlework may reduce your stress. Taking a salsa dancing class may help you unwind and connect with your physical being.

Creative expression also provides a pathway to stay connected to yourself as a person who has meaning and value, even if you may be walking a little slower. As you consider what makes you happy, you can focus on finding ways to maintain a strong connection to doing what you love and maintaining your sense of self. You may have to adapt a little, but staying connected to what defines you as a person is a vital healthy aging strategy! Exploring your creativity provides the pathway.

Final Thoughts

Engaging in a mindful, creative and reflective process can increase your self-awareness and self-understanding. You can set an intention to focus on what you need from your creative efforts, such as healing, strength, gratitude or peace. As you explore creativity, you will create many significant opportunities for social engagement and connection with others, and with yourself.
Our creativity allows us to continually adapt to survive and thrive. Creativity can also be an ally as you age to enhance your brain activity and brain function. Intentionally seek out innovative opportunities to bring new ideas into your life. Surround yourself with the people or things that inspire you to do and learn more. Stay socially connected. The more you interact with other people, regardless of the activities you do, will impact your brain function through the exchange of ideas and being with others. It does not matter if you are talking about politics or music. Putting your ideas and words together is a creative process. Playing a new musical instrument is not only a culturally enriching thing to do, but also helps you to tap into your talents. Doing anything new on the computer takes an open mind and cognitive flexibility. Even learning to dance provides a fun activity and enables you to preserve your balance.

**Expert Insight**

Richard J. Caselli, MD, Professor of Neurology and Medical Director for Service at Mayo Clinic, Phoenix, Arizona.

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**GOAL: Identify one or more creative activities you enjoy and practice them regularly.**
Charter House

211 2nd Street NW
Rochester, MN 55901

507-266-8572

www.charterhouse-mayo.org

email: charterhouse@mayo.edu

Find us on facebook

Dan Abraham Healthy Living Center

565 1st St SW
Rochester, MN 55901

507-266-4688

dahlc.mayoclinic.org

email: dahlc@mayo.edu

Find us on facebook