



integrating body & mind

BY LOTUS ABRAMS
ARTWORK BY ERIC ZENER
PORTRAITS BY SKYE ADDICKS

Local experts — and
a few inspiring elders
— provide practical,
everyday advice for
aging well.

Trending diets, social media fads, and myriad articles and research reports: It can be a challenge to keep up with the onslaught of information on how to feel and look our best as we age. The path to aging well does not have to be overly complicated, however, says Marisha Chilcott, MD, owner of Morpheus Medical Aesthetics, a med-spa with locations in Larkspur and Santa Rosa. Sometimes, it's best to go back to the basics. "There's so much advice out there that it can be overwhelming for people — you can go down such a rabbit hole," Chilcott says. "Many people are looking for things to be simplified."

Fortunately, Marinites have a plethora of local experts to turn to for advice on how to stay fit, healthy, engaged and looking as good on the outside as they do on the inside. Here are some simple, local expert-approved things we can do in our everyday lives to age well on the inside and out. Plus, we got some valuable tips from a few of our communities' vibrant seniors who have celebrated making more than a few trips around the sun.

Keep Your Heart Healthy

In middle age, maintaining cardiovascular health becomes increasingly important, says Darwin Labarthe, MD, Ph.D., MPH, a Marin-based professor of preventive medicine at Northwestern University who focuses on cardiovascular risk. "The benefits are very substantial: living a much longer, healthier life; avoiding heart attacks, strokes and even some cancers; and a better quality of life," he says.



For those looking for guidance, Labarthe recommends reviewing the American Heart Association's guidelines for improving and maintaining cardiovascular health, Life's Essential 8. The eight recommendations — eat better, be more active, quit tobacco, get healthy sleep, manage weight, control cholesterol, manage blood sugar and manage blood pressure — are all explained in straightforward, actionable terms on the American Heart Association's website. "These eight figures have so much to do with our health that they really have quite a broad beneficial impact," Labarthe says.

For Labarthe, who is 83, the Life's Essential 8 guidelines are words to live by. He maintains a healthy diet that's low in salt and high in vegetable content and exercises every day with a

trainer or by walking his dogs on Marin's many scenic trails. "I think I'm healthier now than I was 20 years ago," he says.

Consume Collagen

On the nutrition front, one of the primary things Chilcott recommends her clients do to help them look and feel their best as they age is to consume collagen, a type of protein found naturally in connective tissue, skin, tendons, bones and cartilage. As we age, our collagen production declines, leading to characteristic signs of aging including wrinkles and dry, sagging skin, as well as decreased bone strength. "Taken as a daily supplement, hydrolyzed collagen provides your body with the critical amino acids to not only maintain but also rebuild collagen and connective tissue," Chilcott says.

Tap Into the Power of Positivity

Positive thinking can go a long way in contributing to better quality of life and overall health, including cardiovascular health, Labarthe says. He points to the work of friend and longtime colleague Martin Seligman, Ph.D., a psychologist whose research in the field of positive psychology challenged the traditional approach of the discipline. "Before that, the field of psychology had largely focused on mental

disease and paid little attention to the positive psychological factors that make life worth living,” Labarthe explains. “He found that there are a number of ways in which one can learn to be more positive psychologically and recognize positive and negative signals to build on positive signals and get past the negative ones.”

With the support of a \$2.8 million grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Seligman and the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania have been researching positive health assets — the strengths that can contribute to a healthier, longer life — as part of his Positive Health Initiative. The research has implications for prevention, health promotion, public health and medicine.

Look as Good as You Feel

Positivity is also key in terms of how we view our appearance as we age, affirms Chilcott. “Be aware that the inside and the outside are related,” she says. “There’s a positive feedback loop in the expressions that your face holds and how you feel inside. If you have a negative expression all the time it gives a feedback loop that’s also negative. Not making that expression because of a neuromodulator helps you look better outside and feel better inside.”

Another simple way to look as good as we feel, according to Chil-

cott, is to address the natural “tired” look our eyes start to get as we get older. “As we age, our eyelids get longer, so less light gets into your eyes and you can’t see as well,” she says. Eyelid surgery, while often recommended for people with this issue (ptosis, or low-lying lids), isn’t the only option however. As an alternative, Chilcott has had successful results with her clients using prescription Upneeq eye drops, which produce an eye-opening effect. “Opening the eyes makes you look a lot better, and you also feel better because you can see better,” Chilcott says.

When in doubt about best practices for aging well, tap into local resources. Marin’s many experts can help you feel and look your best as you age, from medical specialists and fitness pros to dietitians and aesthetics specialists.



Words of Wisdom

Marin's seniors have plenty of valuable insight to share about aging well. Here, we asked some local elders — including 102-year-old John Diego in San Rafael — to tell us how they've stayed happy, healthy and engaged as the years go by, along with their best advice for younger generations.

John Diego, 102 San Rafael

Stay involved

"I go to mass every morning and say the rosary. I build bird houses and Adirondack chairs and give them away to family and friends."

Advice for younger generations

"Keep active and treat everybody as if they were your brother and sister."



Holly Kaufman, 80 San Rafael

Stay involved in your community

"I taught elementary school for 40 years, and then after retiring I returned to volunteer. I realized I was happiest there, doing what I loved. My husband and I make 50 bag lunches at a time, at home, and deliver them to St. Vincent's dining room in downtown San Rafael. I think it's the one most significant things I do all week."

Keep your mind engaged

"First thing in the morning, have a cup of coffee! Next: I work on the code message in the newspaper. If I can solve that, I figure I'm good to go for the day. Also, work a crossword puzzle every day, in pen — commit!"

Advice for younger generations

"Live in the moment but prepare for the future. Take care of your body. Pursue an occupation you love. Stay debt-free. Save for retirement. Travel if you can, especially when you're young. It's such a mind-opening, educational experience."



Michael Wakelin, 88
Mill Valley

Keep active

“I’ve played sports my entire life. As I’ve gotten older, I keep active by walking a minimum of 15,000 steps a day in my neighborhood (with lots of hills), and I do a lot of gardening.”

Advice for younger generations

“It’s imperative that you stay active — physically, of course, but just as important is keeping your mind active and engaged. Be interested in the world, network with people and ask questions. I believe that KNEXUS (Knowledge: Networks, Exchange and Uses) is key to aging well and staying mentally fit. Also, it’s okay to indulge, but do it in moderation.”

Marin is a great place to age well because...

“Marin is about community. It has character and really gives one a sense of place. It’s near a global city, progenitor in so much high tech and has a beautiful bay that surrounds it. I’m fortunate to have spent many decades here with the most beautiful view of Mt. Tam from my house.”



Marie Mcennis, 81
Novato

Seek out companionship

“I make an effort to stay in touch with old friends from earlier periods in my life, as well as new friends. My circle of friends includes people 10 to 15 years younger, as well as my own age. I think it’s important to be around people of varying ages with different viewpoints and experiences.”

Advice for younger generations

“I think it’s important to avoid stress. Minimize the presence of people in your life who are negative, unsupportive, and overly demanding of your time and psychological energy. Also, do not overthink things. You wind up twisted up in knots.”

Marin County is the

#1

healthiest county in California

For the 13th time in 14 years, Marin County has once again been named the healthiest of California’s 58 counties in the 2023 County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, published by the University of Wisconsin and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, receiving high scores in both quality and length of life.