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Learning Never Retires: Stay Current, Stay Connected

We have heard it said, "You learn something new every day." We should say, "We need to learn something new every day". Change is constant in our world; technology and society are not slowing down. Older adults are proving that it is important to roll with the changes and stay in tune with the times. Continuous active learning promotes increased knowledge, problem-solving abilities, and decision-making skills. Staying on top of the latest technology, like new smartphones, video games, current events, social apps, and music, helps enhance brain stimulation. Keeping up with the times also helps to maintain independence and improve mental health.

Researchers at the University of California, Riverside report that "older adults who challenge themselves to learn new things are less likely to experience loneliness or depression." There seems to be a connection between learning new skills and improved mental health. According to the K-State Research and Extension lesson series on "Keys to Embracing Aging," people who have reached 100 years of age or older report that staying connected and learning new things has allowed them to live so long. So, what are some ways you can stay connected?

Music surrounds us, from grocery stores, small town main streets, fitness centers, elevators, and hair salons. There are many health benefits of listening to music. Music releases a chemical in our brains called dopamine, the feel-good chemical. When you listen to music, you feel better and enjoy the experience. Music can also enhance perception, distract from pain, reduce stress, lower blood pressure, relax muscles, and stimulate old memories.

Computers and the internet can be used to stay connected to vast amounts of information and maintain social connections. Video calls are a way to stay connected with family and friends who live in different locations. It's just as easy to make a video call as a telephone call to a distant friend. You might even connect with family members and friends you have been out of touch with. The possibilities are endless. Computers can be used for live streaming programs, games, shopping, banking, research, and more.

Just remember to stay safe when surfing the net. You can take the following steps to protect yourself.

- Make sure to lock all devices when you are not using them. Protect the device with a password, fingerprint, or facial recognition.
- Keep your software and apps up to date. Software that is updated has improved security measures.
- Create strong passwords that are at least 16 characters long, random, and unique for each account.
- Share with care. The more personal details revealed on social networking sites, the easier it may be for scammers to steal our identities.

In this age of rapidly changing technology, many older adults stay current; you can too. By staying engaged, we can stay connected.