

Aging Well with Asperger's By David Stamps

There are several factors that help me Age Well with Asperger's:

1. Volunteerism
2. Exercise
3. Friendship
4. Active reading.

Together these help build and maintain the resilience we all need to Age Well.

Some define resilience as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress.

1. Volunteerism

There are many organizations that desperately need volunteers to support their mission from the Red Cross to local Soup Kitchens. Others include historical building organizations like Historic New England, Museums like MFA or Museum of Science. Home Health organizations and Meals on Wheels also need volunteers. These organizations will provide training and often pair you with more experienced people.

Benefits:

Volunteering will connect you with others with similar interests in a structured setting. This is great for people with Asperger's who have trouble functioning in unstructured settings.

Volunteering will also increase your sense of self-worth by helping others and develop new skills.

2. Exercise

Exercise is not just about building up muscles that we may have learned in high school. Exercise can be as simple as walk around the block to running or biking around the Charles River. Exercises can include vigorous weight and other high-intensity workouts, which should always be begun after consultation with your doctor. Many gyms like Planet Fitness have non-competitive programs and trainers available to help you establish routines that will work for your age and physical abilities.

Benefits: Exercise is vital to good mental health as well as attenuating the effects of aging on our bones and connective tissues. Depending on your level of exercise, it can increase dopamine production – a very cheap “high.” Outdoor exercise can stimulate vitamin D production. Exercise can also connect you with nature.

3. Friendship

Aspies may feel isolated due to their difficulties in functioning in social settings. However, Aspies can also connect one-on-one or in controlled group such as the “Over 50” group here at AANE. Friendships for Aspies will never likely be like the “Friends” that are portrayed on TV. Indeed, even non-Aspies have challenges making and keeping friends; this becomes a greater challenge as we age. I have discovered that good friendship is often not accidental but intentional. Intentional in that you will have to be proactive in calling or texting to meetup at lunch or for coffee or a walk in a local park.

Benefits: Conversation, support different point of views

4. Active book reading

Active reading means reading new and challenging books as well as warm and fuzzy books. Novels will provide you with new perspectives and understandings.