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## Healthy Behaviors Linked to Higher Level of Mental Well-Being

Managing stress, pursuing a purpose in life most closely associated with mental well-being, new AARP survey finds.

**Washington, DC** — Good news: Our feeling of mental well-being increases as we age, with people age 54-plus reporting the highest level of mental well-being, according to AARP's latest consumer survey. Effectively managing stress levels and pursuing a purpose in life were most closely linked to people's mental well-being, and African-Americans and married adults reported the highest scores on mental well-being.

"The people who have a greater sense of mental well-being as they go through life are those who engage in the most number of healthy behaviors," said Sarah Lock, AARP Senior Vice President for Policy, and Executive Director of the [Global Council on Brain Health](#). "We were looking for the connections between positive mental health and brain health and we found people's secrets to successful aging. Exercising, eating a healthy diet, socializing, managing stress, and learning new things are the best things you can do to improve your mental well-being as you age."

Using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS), AARP's latest survey asked adults age 18 and older about their mental well-being and which healthy behaviors they engaged in. The survey also asked what motivated adults to participate in healthy behaviors.

### Measuring Well-Being

The 14-item WEMWBS scale examines two dimensions of mental well-being (happiness and psychological functioning) by asking people how frequently they feel about such things as whether they are thinking clearly, and feeling loved, confident, cheerful, relaxed, and interested in new things. The majority of adults said they felt positive about 13 of the 14 items either often or all the time.

Being able to make up their own mind and thinking clearly topped the list of things people said they felt often or all of the time. Feeling relaxed and having energy to spare ranked last. Mental well-being improves in midlife with people age 54 and older having above average scores. Adults between the ages of 27-35 had the lowest average well-being score; people ages 72-plus had the highest average well-being score.

### Relationship Between Well-Being and Healthy Behaviors

Effectively managing life's stresses and pursuing a purpose in life were the two activities most closely correlated with mental well-being. Interestingly, getting 7-8 hours of sleep each night and drinking up to two alcoholic beverages a day were both associated with above average well-being. Also consistently linked to feelings of well-being were:

- Learning new things
- Eating a healthy diet
- Socializing with friends/family
- Getting enough sleep
- Exercising
- Reading

### Motivations for Healthy Behaviors

The survey found that adults who engaged in more healthy behaviors had higher levels of mental well-being. Most adults (70%) reported that they participate in healthy behaviors that happen to be good for brain health. People who knew someone with dementia were much more likely than others to be concerned about their own future brain health. Respondents' top motivations for maintaining brain health:

#### Very important/Important

- |  |     |
|--|-----|
| • Maintaining overall health             | 86% |
| • Maintaining independence               | 85% |
| • Being able to keep doing things I love | 82% |
| • Being able to achieve personal goals   | 81% |

“Limiting their alcohol intake, reading more, and increasing exercise were the top of the list of things that people said they would be willing to do if they knew they were good for their brain health,” said Lock.

### **About the Survey**

**Methodology:** This online survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,609 adults age 18+ was conducted for AARP by GfK from March 11–27, 2016. Additional interviews were conducted among 492 Hispanic/Latino, 502 African-American, and 353 Asian-American adults age 18+. All data was weighted by age, gender, race, ethnicity, employment status, and income. The margin of error for the national sample of 1,609 adults age 18+ is +/- 2%; the margin of error was higher among subgroups.

The full results of the survey can be found here: [www.aarp.org/2016SurveyonWellBeing](http://www.aarp.org/2016SurveyonWellBeing)

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### **About AARP**

*AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, with a membership of nearly 38 million that helps people turn their goals and dreams into 'Real Possibilities' by changing the way America defines aging. With staffed offices in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, AARP works to strengthen communities and promote the issues that matter most to families such as healthcare security, financial security and personal fulfillment. AARP also advocates for individuals in the marketplace by selecting products and services of high quality and value to carry the AARP name. As a trusted source for news and information, AARP produces the world's largest circulation magazine, AARP The Magazine and AARP Bulletin. AARP does not endorse candidates for public office or make contributions to political campaigns or candidates. To learn more, visit [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org) or follow @aarp and our CEO @JoAnn\_Jenkins on Twitter.*

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