

## Successful Aging



by *John C. Griffin, M.Sc.,*

What does ‘successful aging’ mean to you? Let me paint a picture of a 75-year-old man or woman who has aged successfully. They would do more volunteer work, exercise more, and attend more community activities. They would see doctors less and spend less time sick in bed. They would have the energy to do things they enjoy. They would have more excitement, pleasure, and meaning in their everyday lives.

The notion of successful aging is an attractive one. It speaks to quality of life while aging. Successful agers are people who are more satisfied with life. They have healthy genes and better than average health in both body and mind.

Research tells us that people with lower health risks live longer. Lowering these risks means not smoking, having a healthy weight, and exercising. By lowering health risks, people also ‘age successfully’, because they tend to have disability later in life. They have less disability at any given age. So their disabilities do not get as much of a chance to add up and aggravate each other.

Researchers found the onset of disability was postponed by more than five years in the low-risk group as compared with a high risk group. These results are encouraging.

### *How many “healthy life years” will you have left at age 65?*

Researchers have also been looking at recent statistics from 27 European countries. They defined ‘healthy life years’ as the number of years that a person can expect to live, after the age of 65, without a health problem or disability that limits how well they function in their normal activities.

In 2010, people who were 65 in 27 European Union countries were expected to live:

- an estimated 21 years if they were women and
- 17.4 years if they were men.

Within that timeframe, women would have 8.8 healthy life years. Men would have 8.7 healthy life years. The highest number of healthy life years at age 65 for women was recorded in Sweden at 15.5 years.

### *Where staying active fits in*

Regular physical activity has a good influence on many of our body’s systems. It may be a lifestyle factor that makes the difference between those who experienced successful aging and those who don’t. The key to successful aging is to integrate positive physical, social, mental, emotional, and spiritual activities into our daily lives.

## Learn more:

Eurostat Press Office (2012). At the age of 65, both women and men are expected to live a further nine years in a healthy condition. **Eurostat Press Office**, April 19. <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>

Vita, A., Terry, R., Hubert, H. and Fries, J. (1998). Aging, Health Risk, and Cumulative Disability. **The New England Journal of Medicine**. 338(15), 1035-1041.

## About the Author:

**John C. Griffin**, MSc., was a professor in the Fitness and Lifestyle Management Program at George Brown College in Toronto for 37 years. He is now a private consultant, speaker, coach, and writer for public and private sector organizations. John has authored more than 60 publications, numerous manuals, and a textbook published by Human Kinetics, *Client-Centered Exercise Prescription*. John is currently doing research on the functional mobility of adults 50-70 years of age.