By 2030, the U.S. Census Bureau projects that 1 in 5 residents will be older than age 65. As people reach this milestone, more and more people will want to — or need to — continue working. Whether you still work in your later years may depend on your health. About 8 out of 10 older adults have at least one chronic disease, and many have two or more.

There are many things you can do to improve your chances of working until later in life. We have heard for years that healthy habits increase our chances of living longer. A recent [study](https://www.bmj.com/content/368/bmj.l6669) shows that certain habits can also keep us healthier. Researchers looked at five lifestyle factors: healthy diet, regular physical activity, no tobacco use, moderate alcohol use, and healthy weight. Women (aged 50) who adopted four or five of these behaviors could expect to live another 34 years free of diabetes, heart disease or cancer; for men aged 50, it was 31 years. For those who didn’t practice any of the healthy habits, only 23 years would be disease free. If an extra decade of staying healthy sounds good to you, consider these habits:

* **Be active and stay active.** 30 minutes of [moderate or brisk activity](https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/older_adults/) each day helps keep chronic diseases away. Find something you enjoy and stick with it!
* **Eat a healthy diet** with plenty of fruits, veggies, legumes, nuts, seeds, and whole grains; moderate amounts of poultry, seafood, eggs, and dairy; and small portions of red meats, snack foods, and sweets. A [Mediterranean Diet](https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/mediterranean-diet/art-20047801) is a good example of a healthful diet.
* **Avoid tobacco** or tobacco products, as well as tobacco smoke. For those trying to quit, visit the [Quit Partner](https://www.quitpartnermn.com/) website.
* **Practice moderation, if you drink alcohol.** No more than one drink a day for women or two drinks a day for men. To learn more, visit this [Centers](https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/faqs.htm) for Disease Control and Prevention website.
* **Maintain a healthy weight.** Easier said than done, but any movement toward a healthy weight is a step in the right direction. And if you work on the first two habits listed above (being active, eating healthy), healthy weight may be a natural consequence.

These recommendations are nothing new, but they do work. Even if you can’t do all five, do what you can. Each habit helps on its own, and the more the better. Strive for improvement, not perfection.

# Healthy lifestyle and life expectancy free of cancer, cardiovascular disease, and type 2 diabetes: prospective cohort study: ***BMJ*** 2020; 368 doi: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.l6669> (Published 08 January 2020)

How Much Physical Activity Do Older Adults Need: <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/older_adults/>

Mediterranean Diet: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/mediterranean-diet/art-20047801>

Quit Partner: <https://www.quitpartnermn.com/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/faqs.htm>