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FROM GOOD INTENTIONS TO NEW HABITS FOR AGING WELL

The Vitality Portfolio® Can Help You Take Action

KAY VAN NORMAN

Maintaining health and independence is consistently listed as one of the top two aging concerns. The other is building financial security. Creating a financial portfolio by making a plan, balancing assets, and making regular deposits is a familiar strategy to build financial security.

But what about your health and independence? Do you have a plan? Have you considered what “assets” you’ll need to support lifelong vitality, and whether your daily habits—your deposits—are taking you toward or away from your healthy aging goals?

Most people, if asked, say they intend to age well. They can recite what’s necessary to retain health—eat nutritious food, be physically active, stay engaged in life—but have a difficult time moving from intentions into actions.

I wanted to help people bridge this gap and embrace positive change. So, I created a practical roadmap to lifelong health in three simple steps I call the Vitality Portfolio®:

- Make a plan
- Balance vitality assets
- Make regular deposits

MAKE A PLAN

How long do you expect to live? I ask this question during keynote speeches and people always seem to have a number in mind. Consider your number. Where it comes from is a question for another time, so consider instead what you want to be able to do through your full lifespan! Whether your number is 70-plus or 100-plus, consider where you want to live, what you want to be able to do and what you need to make that happen.

People often spend more time planning vacations (where, what, how) than they do planning their lives. Making a vitality plan helps you set, track, and reach your goals for lifelong health.

BALANCE VITALITY ASSETS

After 25 years immersed in the field of healthy aging, I've identified three main assets groups that, when combined, consistently create a strong foundation for lifelong health.

Wellness, including the six dimensions of health.

Core, including ageless thinking and resilience.

Functional, including strength, mobility, and endurance.

Following are expanded explanations about these three assets:

Wellness Assets: To assess life balance, visualize the six dimensions of health—physical, social, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and vocational—as spokes on a wheel. Consider how many regular deposits you make into each dimension (spoke).

If you drew your Wellness Wheel today, would some spokes be large (lots of deposits) while others would barely exist? Are you missing an entire spoke on your wheel? The Wellness Wheel is a visual reminder to consciously create a richly balanced life for optimal health.

Core Assets: These assets—ageless thinking and resilience—are my favorite things to talk about! You're probably already well aware of the power of attitudes and expectations to uplift and enrich lives.

Immersing yourself in a culture of possibilities and associating with others who believe in positive aging helps you deliberately reject negative expectations of aging and activate Ageless Thinking. It also triggers a mindset of resilience to engage adaptive strategies and keep moving forward, regardless of age or challenges.

My friend Eldo taught me everything I needed to know about the core assets. At age 82, he broke his back and neck falling off a haystack. His large group of horseback riding friends were devastated, certain he was finished.

But when I walked into his hospital room, the first thing he said was, "I can't believe I messed up my whole summer of riding." It never occurred to him that he couldn't recover because of age. With Ageless Thinking, every decision he made, every action he took, was focused on fullest recovery.

Eldo also activated the building blocks of resilience: optimism, self-efficacy, purpose, and social engagement. He made a plan and asked for what he needed to recover. Two days after being discharged from the hospital, he co-hosted a

Fourth of July barbeque! It was a very clear signal: "Don't count me out I'm still part of this group."

Seven weeks later, Eldo called to say the doctor had cleared him to ride and we went to the mountains. After two months of building strength and stamina, he rode our annual 24-mile loop in Yellowstone National Park. Now age 89, he continues his passion for riding. How different his story would have been without ageless thinking and resilience.

Functional Assets: Strength, mobility and endurance are essential functional assets. Yet it's easy to disregard gradual changes. For example, if you're not regularly challenging your strength, you're losing it, at an average rate of about 1 to 1.5 percent per year after about age 30.

That doesn't sound like a lot until you do the math and realize that you can easily lose almost half your strength by age 70. That's like going about your daily life carrying a backpack filled with your body weight (half the strength requires double the effort).

In some ways, immediate feedback would serve us better. For example, if after a week of sedentary behavior we found ourselves unable to get out of bed, that would inspire action!

MAKE DEPOSITS

It's not enough to have a plan and identify vitality assets. You must choose action. You must make deposits! Many people fear the big things that can derail health, such as an injury or illness.

But most often, it's the small choices, made day after day and compounded over time, that determine health outcomes. Don't leave your health to chance. Make a plan, balance your assets and make regular deposits for lifelong vitality.



Kay Van Norman is president of Brilliant Aging and an internationally known author, writer and thought leader in healthy aging. Her passion is uncovering hidden barriers so that people can move from intending to age well into taking actions that will help ensure that they age well. Visit kayvannorman.com for a free downloadable Vitality Portfolio® tool kit to get you started.