



## FROM THE EXPERTS

# Express Yourself!

From *UCLA Health's Healthy Years newsletter*.

WATCHING AN ARTIST PAINT, A dancer gracefully glide across the stage or a singer belt out a happy tune is witnessing bliss personified. Children can find that joyful state of absorption rather easily: A single crayon on paper can do it. As adults, however, we often lose that sense of blissful play. But it can be found again.

"Because the arts serve as an emotional and physical outlet,

they also help to decrease stress and combat depression and loneliness," explains Erica Curtis, board certified art therapist and instructor for the UCLA Arts and Healing Social Emotional Arts (SEA) certificate program. "It's a healthy means of distraction from pains, discomfort or other stressors."

### THE POWER OF MAKING MUSIC TOGETHER

Researchers from the University of Oxford wanted to explore whether singing was a special

type of bonding behavior or whether any group activity would build bonds among members. To test the theory, they set up seven courses: four in singing, two in crafts and one in creative writing. Each course, made up of weekly sessions, ran for seven months. Those attending the classes were given surveys before and after individual sessions in the first month, in the third month and at the end of the course. In the surveys, they were asked to rate how close

they felt to their classmates.

At the end of the seven months, all the participants reported similar levels of closeness, but those in the singing group stated feeling closer to their classmates earlier in the process.

Singing also requires breath control, which can improve lung function and decrease stress. A small study found that regular singing might have a positive effect for those who have COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease).



Learning to play an instrument, or dusting off one you used to play, can work wonders on your mood. A study published in the journal *Mental Health Practice* found that the use of music as a therapy for people over the age of 65 has a positive influence on well-being by providing enjoyment, social interaction, improved memory and social inclusion.

### **MOVING YOUR FEET TO THE BEAT FEELS GOOD AND MAY REDUCE FALL RISK**

Osteoarthritis is common in older adults, and movement helps improve circulation to ease the pain of arthritis. Dancing alone or with others can be a great way to feel better fast. In a small study from St. Louis University Medical Center, researchers found that dancing eased hip and knee pain and also helped older adults move

better. The findings are especially noteworthy because they point out that older adults who walk too slowly are more likely to fall, become hospitalized or require care from others. Dancing requires coordination, balance and control—all useful in preventing falls. Styles of dance exercise classes include everything from Zumba Gold (a less intense version of the Latin-inspired dance class) to more free-form styles, such as Nia.

There are also more-formal, partner dance classes where you can learn everything from salsa to waltz. Most programs don't require you to have your own partner. In fact, they're a great way to meet new people.

### **PLAY WITH PAPER AND ONLINE GAMES**

Adult coloring books have

become quite popular and can be an enjoyable way to play with crayons, colored pencils and paints. For those who prefer to draw outside the lines, the choices are virtually unlimited. Head to a craft store for inspiration. You'll find all sorts of colors, glitter, glue, printed tape and stickers.

Here are a few ideas:

- Clip images from magazines to create a collage.
- Arrange old photos and memorabilia into scrapbooks.
- Try online painting programs to doodle digitally.

Online art games designed for children are typically easy to use and offer the mental challenge of drawing with computer tools. When it comes to online games, one study found that older adults who occasionally played online video games reported higher levels of well-being than their non-gaming counterparts.

"Arts participation enhances overall quality of life, including emotional and physical well-being," says Curtis. "Older adults can feel a sense of connection with others by participating in a shared creative activity or simply by sharing their creative expression, such as a drawing or painting, with friends, loved ones or caretakers."

You can find adult art and dance classes through local universities, community centers, churches, the YMCA and park districts. Before you sign up, you may want to visit the center, observe a class and talk with the instructor. Curtis recommends looking for classes that are respectful of individual expression and that feel inspiring to you.

For more information about UCLA Health's Healthy Years, visit [www.universityhealthnews.com/hysub-kjp](http://www.universityhealthnews.com/hysub-kjp).

## **Retirement**

# **Work Longer, Live Longer**

From *Focus on Healthy Aging*, a newsletter from the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.

**Don't race to retire. A study in the *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* suggests that working past age 65 could lead to longer life, while retiring early may be a risk factor for dying earlier. The 18-year study examined data on 2,956 people and found that healthy adults who retired one year past age 65 had an 11% lower risk for death from all causes, even when taking into account demographic, lifestyle and health issues. Adults who described themselves as unhealthy were also likely to live longer if they kept working, which indicates that factors beyond health may affect post-retirement mortality. Additional research is needed to better understand the links between work and health—and keep in mind that as people get older, their physical health and cognitive function are likely to decline, which can affect both their ability to work and their longevity.**

For more, visit [www.universityhealthnews.com/fhsub-kjp](http://www.universityhealthnews.com/fhsub-kjp).