

Unbind Your Mind & Learn Something New

By Jacqueline Pike

The Administration for Community Living observes May as Older Americans Month. This year's theme, *Aging Unbound*, promotes the importance of seeking out new experiences as we age.

Why not take their theme as your invitation to reignite your creativity and do something you've always wanted to do? Now you might just have some time in your schedule.

A recent blog post from the team at [Scientific American](#) summarized a study designed to measure cognitive growth in older adults.

The study asked older adults, ages 58-86 to take three to five new classes simultaneously for three months, similar to an undergraduate course load.. The participants also had weekly sessions to monitor progress and discuss barriers, resilience, and the value of the learning.

The findings were interesting. Those adults that participated in the learning increased their cognitive abilities to levels like those of middle-aged adults in roughly half a semester! The control group participants, who were active community members but didn't take the classes, experienced no such gain.

A meta-analysis of the scientific literature on older adult learning, cognition and well-being published in [Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine](#) revealed an emerging consensus that older adult learning results in:

- Increase in self-confidence
- Increase in life satisfaction
- Increased quality of life & self-dependency
- Increased sense of belonging
- Increases in healthy cognitive functioningⁱ

The challenge of learning something new as an older person can be intimidating. However, the feeling of accomplishment that comes with success can open new doors to growth and independence. It can make us less fearful of whatever challenges may lie ahead.

Elder Services of Cape Cod & the Islands, in partnership with Senior Planet, offers free in-person computer skills classes. Sylvia Lamb, who recently took the basic computer course said, "because of taking the Senior Planet computer course, I am no longer afraid of using the computer."

Fortunately for us, Cape Cod offers a wealth of opportunities for older adults to learn, stay engaged and remain active and stay physically, mentally, and spiritually fit well into old age regardless of our previous formal education or financial means. I've included links to a sampling of these [here](#).

Whichever path you choose, study the fundamental principles. This will lay a foundation for better understanding.

Try not to stress about the end goal or the reward. Trust the process and enjoy yourself. Stay open, calm and pace yourself.

Staying engaged and active in the community can also help to combat loneliness. Finding new purpose and meaning can help others do the same.

Any learning opportunity can change your life and your brain for the better!

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