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[Healthy Aging: A Guide to Lifelong Wellness](#)

Welcome to Healthier You by Vanderbilt Health & Wellness, a podcast to help Vanderbilt faculty and staff with their healthiest lives.

DO: I am excited to introduce Dr. Goyal who is a gerontologist here at VUMC. Dr. Goyal, thank you so much for joining us today on the Healthier You podcast. Would you mind sharing with us just a little bit about who you are and what you do here at Vanderbilt?

PG: First of all, thank you for having me here on the Healthier You podcast. My name is Parul Goyal. I am an associated professor of clinical medicine here at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, and I practice both internal medicine and geriatric medicine.

DO: Awesome! Well, thank you again for joining us today. Earlier this year, I learned that September is healthy aging month. There are so many elements of the aging process that are important for us to know about our health. So, I am really excited to dive in with you today to learn about how healthy aging is relevant to our health journey. So, perhaps we will start here, what is healthy aging and why do you feel like it is an important topic to discuss.

PG: I am so glad that finally we have a healthy aging month, which is September. Healthy aging as described by the World Health Organization is a life-long process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables well-being in older age. It is important to discuss that so that we can all age gracefully and stay functionally independent throughout our life span. It is actually a whole-body approach because it involves taking care of one's physical, emotional, mental, and social wellbeing.

DO: Yeah, that's awesome and I love how they have taken a holistic approach at what it looks like to age healthily. So, thank you for sharing that. Well, many of our younger listeners may be tempted to believe

that this podcast episode is not for them. We often know that the term aging is correlated to an older population. So, what insight do you have for us to share about aging to those who may be in their twenties or thirties?

PG: Excellent question. Believe it or not, our body starts to age in our twenties. So, it is very important for people in their twenties and thirties to recognize what healthy aging is so that they can actually develop practices that become habits for them as they age. Some of them include practices involving physical health, which would encompass diet and activity levels.

DO: Yeah, absolutely. That is such a powerful insight to know that we start to age in our twenties, and we can even start to do things now that can help that process. Well, because it is healthy aging month, let's take a deeper dive into specific recommendations. So, first, what foods should we emphasize to promote healthy aging and why?

PG: Diet is extremely important for healthy aging. A diet that is recommended includes whole grains, nuts, beans, seeds, having your servings of fruits and vegetables, leafy greens. Avoiding processed food. Using fish and white meat instead, avoiding red meat, using healthier oil such as olive oils and avocado oil, and of course not smoking or drinking.

DO: Since you have kind of already touched on some of those physical activity elements, what recommendations can you share with us to keep us active as we age?

PG: My recommendations to keep us active as we age is to optimize our functional ability. So, that means, where exercises are incorporated in our daily routine, which would include both aerobic exercise such as walking or jogging, strength training such as lifting weights or Pilates, and balance such as Tai Chi or yoga.

DO: I love how you have shared with us many different ways that we can stay active and for those listeners who may not be the body builder or may not be the runner, you have shared so many different options that we can stay active with as we age. So, thank you for sharing that. Well, there has been such exciting information released about blue zones, which are communities that commonly have the oldest living populations. So, what can you share with us about what you know about blue zones and how it relates to aging healthily.

PG: Excellent question. Blue zones, as you said, are areas around the world where people live considerably longer, healthier lives than the rest of the population. Such areas are in Japanese island of Okinawa, but in fact there is actually a blue zone in the United States that is Loma Linda in California. People typically in the blue zones, they follow plant-based diet, they do white meat, fish. They actually stop eating when they are 80% full. They take time to maybe relax and have an afternoon siesta, if they can. They are very engaged socially in their community. They involve practices in which they are volunteering in their community. They have a very clear sense of purpose, and of course, they all engage in daily exercise.

DO: I mean, it is clear that these blue zones have a secret to living longer and healthier so that is interesting to consider. And, since you kind of talked about you know just social engagement, would you mind just sharing with us a little bit more about the power of social connectedness?

DO: So, you touched on social engagement with blue zone communities. So, could you share with us a little bit more about the power of social connectiveness as we age.

PG: Power of social connectiveness is extremely profound and is as important as following a healthy lifestyle. Some of the examples include being a part of a faith-based community or being a part of a book club, or senior community center, and/or volunteer to give a clear sense of purpose to life.

DO: Yeah, you know that is powerful to consider that just as much as living a healthy life and doing kind of the more activity and eating the healthy foods, can be just as powerful and important to stay socially connected. To close, what recommendations do you have to share with our listeners on how to age healthily starting today.

PG: My recommendation for our listeners would be to make small achievable, sustainable changes in their lifestyle toward healthy aging. Some of the examples could be making a goal to exercise most days of the week starting 10 minutes a day to eventually reach to 30 minutes per day such that it eventually becomes a habit or cutting down on fast food to once per week, or stop smoking, or stop drinking.

DO: Yeah, absolutely, and you know you have provided some recommendations that really seem to focus on starting small. So, some of those smaller habits such as exercising, even just 10 minutes per day, I mean it's awesome to know that those shifts in our habits and behaviors can really be powerful as we age.

Dr. Goyal, thank you again for joining us today. Your insight has been so valuable and such a great reminder to us as to why healthy aging is always a relevant topic to discuss.

PG: Thank you once again for having me here, and I am happy that we are celebrating a healthy aging month. Thank you again to Health Plus.

Thanks for tuning in to Healthier You by Vanderbilt Health & Wellness. If you are a Vanderbilt University Medical Center faculty or staff member, you can earn credit on your Go for the Gold Wellness Actions blog by listening to two podcasts during season one. Simply click the Go for the Gold link in the show notes below to record your participation and stay tuned for future episodes.