



10 new things for you to try

By Christine Crosbie

Spring is a time for new beginnings. As the days get longer and warmer we suddenly feel like new people, re-energized and ready to go. Why not make this your season to shake things up a little, be adventurous and try something different. It could be a small change that gives you something different to think and talk about, or the start of a whole new chapter in your life.

1 Try a new routine

Have a look at your day. Do you always wake up, turn on the radio and make coffee? Do you then read the paper, walk the dog, then grab some lunch? What happens every afternoon? The old adage “a change is better than a rest” really does apply in many circumstances. Examine your routine and see how you can improve it. Is there a way to be more efficient

with your time? Are important things, such as exercise, falling by the wayside because it's easier to watch the television? Try a day without the computer and see what happens. Can you include others in your daily activities on a regular basis? It's more fun doing groceries or running errands together.

2 *Form a new social group*

You may already be an avid bridge or golf player and have formed a circle of friends around these hobbies. But maybe it's time to widen your social horizon by plunging into a new pastime.

Believe it or not, knitting has become trendy again and it's safe to say that some groups of young knitters would love the advice of a pro. Book clubs have popped up in every segment of society. People of all ages are gathering to read, review and discuss the latest novels or old classics in private homes, retirement residences, libraries and community centres. Join a local scrap-booking club, a music appreciation society or even a choir. In the end, what could be better? You'll have surrounded yourself with an exciting new group of passionate and like-minded individuals.

3 *Learn a new language*

We've been told that learning a new language may help to strengthen the brain and possibly delay or prevent the onset of cognitive loss from conditions such as Alzheimer's disease. Continuing education classes offer language courses, but you can also teach yourself with lesson books, audiotapes or DVDs and by watching films and reading books.

Conversation classes and informal "cafés" are available for those who already have a grasp of another language but haven't spoken it in a while. These face-to-face chat sessions also offer the opportunity to make friends and give you a reason to get out of the house.

4 *Taste a new cuisine*

It's easy to fall into a food rut: We have our comfort meals, our easy-to-make menus and convenient frozen foods to pop in the oven without much thought. But how about trying something completely different? A huge variety of foods are out there to taste, whether at a restaurant or at home. Invite a friend to

lunch at a new restaurant or get some spicy or vegetarian take-out.

If you like the flavour, try making it at home. Buy or borrow a cookbook and then visit a local market and expose yourself to things you may never have tried (or even seen!). Have you ever tasted a dragon fruit, mangosteen or lychees? Why not grab an assortment of exotic fruit or vegetables and invite friends over for a taste-test? Even if you don't love them, you can say you've tried them and take pleasure in describing the experience to others.

5 *Make new friends*

Strong friendships can last a lifetime, but circumstances change as we age and it can become harder to connect with our close friends as they move away or become less mobile. Look around you and see if there's someone interesting you'd like to get to know better. This may be a neighbour you've only had brief chats with or a person at the coffee shop you've seen before but never approached. Take the next move and get into a conversation to see what you might have in common. Make a coffee date or arrange to meet at the same place next week. You can't have too many friends, so reach out and give people a chance to open up to you.

6 *Visit new places*

Without a car or easy access to public transportation, it's easy to stick to your immediate neighbourhood when you venture out. Plan a short escape, even a day-trip, to someplace you have never visited before. Team up with a friend, a group of friends or a relative and book bus or train tickets to your destination. Call up the visitors' bureau of larger metropolitan areas to find out what events might interest older adults, and ask around to see if anyone else has been to your chosen destination.

If you don't want to range too far, you may be surprised at what you can find just a few kilometres from home. Many local neighbourhoods have changed radically in the past five to 10 years.

7 *Achieve new things*

There are lots of things we'd like to do that just seem too daunting: Reading a big fat work of literature, walking a five-kilometre charity

**"It is wonderful
how much
may be done
if we are
always doing."**

Thomas Jefferson

“Cloud nine gets all the publicity, but cloud eight actually is cheaper, less crowded and has a better view.”

George Carlin

event, keeping a journal, getting regular exercise. Bad habits may be hard to break, but good ones can be surprisingly easy to take on. Try the 30-day rule: Focus on doing the activity daily for a month, but no more. Chances are, when you get to the end of the month the pattern will be ingrained and you'll be able to keep going with it and reach your goals.

Make whatever you've chosen a priority, not the last thing you do before going to bed, since there are usually many things we don't get to by the end of the day. Take that morning walk after breakfast, before you tackle your usual chores and duties. Write in your journal first thing. Start studying long before bedtime so you don't fall asleep after the first few pages. Before you know it, you'll feel the satisfaction of having completed that long walk, read that classic novel or lost those five pounds at the gym.

8 Introduce yourself to new ideas

Most provinces and states have special programs for older adults, known as institutes of lifelong learning, elder colleges, learning in retirement, seniors' education centres and so on. They are affiliated with universities and colleges, but there are no exams, prerequisites or age limits. “Classes” consist of small study groups of adults who meet in person on campus and learn from each other. Members can use the library of the college to do research and then give talks with slide shows, PowerPoint presentations or written materials. The participants then have discussions and debates on the subject, which can include art, architecture, history, literature, health or philosophy. There are even creative-writing workshops and classes to help you write your autobiography!

For those of you comfortable with the internet, the University of the Third Age offers online courses that you can participate in from the comfort of your home or library. Some programs require a small enrolment fee. Many museums offer free or inexpensive lectures about the artifacts in their collections.

9 Support new causes

Don't just sit there, do something! Are there problems in your neighbourhood, issues that get you thinking, crises you wish could be solved? Virtually every non-profit organization

needs volunteers, whether it's to make fundraising calls, visit hospitals, walk dogs or petition city government for neighbourhood improvements. Countless studies say that seniors who volunteer generally live longer, healthier and more fulfilling lives. Often the person who benefits the most from volunteering isn't the recipient, it's the volunteer.

The Government of Canada has a website, www.seniors.gc.ca, that offers connections to volunteer opportunities. In addition, www.youngretired.ca and www.charityvillage.com can help match you with a cause that suits your skills, whether it's becoming a board member or pitching in to build a house. Your local library, community centre or schools may offer more suggestions.

10 Get a new attitude

The scientific field of positive psychology has virtually exploded in recent years. Studies have shown us how happiness can help us to live longer, and that we can change our attitudes and adopt a better mindset. While we may not be able to cure our illnesses, improve our wealth or change our family members, we are able to take responsibility for our own attitudes. There are many self-help books out there (just type in “happiness” on the Amazon.ca page!). Not all of them are well researched or backed by science, so first read some reviews and check the author's credibility. Some of these books are very funny and others are inspiring. Many are targeted specifically at retirees and seniors.

As someone once said, “Try everything once; then go back and do the things you like again.” This will likely make you a happier person. A recent study looked back at the diaries of 500 people recounting events that had happened to them, positive and negative. Those who engaged in a variety of experiences were more likely to have happy memories and to downplay the negative ones than people who had fewer experiences. So whether it's tasting a new fruit or learning Spanish, broadening your experiences can have a positive impact on your life, at any age. ●

Christine Crosbie is a freelance writer based in Toronto, ON.

