Whatâ??s your attitude toward getting older? Do you, like Johnny Mercer, â??Accentuate the Positive?â??

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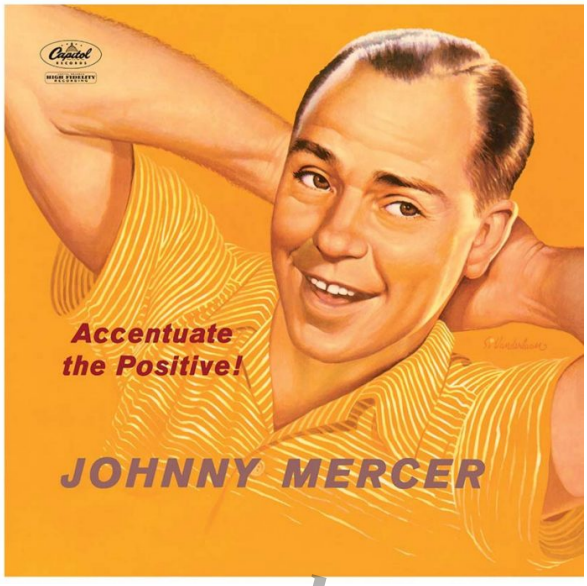
Next year Iâ??m turning 80. When I thought about the chronological number, I felt scared because that sounded *really* old.

I feel better when I come across reports of 80+ people doing things that seem amazing. Thereâ??s the â??Nimbleweed Nomad,â?• otherwise known as M.J. â??Sunnyâ?• Eberhard, 83, who started walking when he retired 25 years ago, and now is the oldest person to have hiked the entire Appalachian Trail.

Thereâ??s Virginia Oliver, 101, Maine lobster fisherwoman, still working. How about Marge Carl, 92, who lays one up playing basketball? Her team, Splash, is part of the San Diego Senior Womenâ??s Basketball Association.

But on the other side of the coin, I know there are people who donâ??t do so well in their 80s. As one of my 80+ friends said, â??My friends are either falling or dying.â?•

I knew it did me no good to retreat into fear. So, I decided to find out what the experts on aging have to say. As Dr. Gayatri Devi, a neurologist at New Yorkâ??s Lenox Hill Hospital, said, â??Your attitude can make a difference.â?•



Songwriter Johnny Mercer, founder of Capitol Records, released â??Accentuate the Positive â?• in 1944. (

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University of California-San Francisco professor of medicine emeritus Dr. William Grossman, who is 81, told me, â??As the old song goes*, â??Youâ??re got to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative.â??â?*•

Along with adopting a positive attitude, the experts say we need to gain perspective. â??Get ready for aging by realizing what part of your life is under your control,â?• advises Tom Ludwig, emeritus professor of psychology at Hope College in Michigan.

The Rev. Glenda Hope, 85, is able to do this, she said, because â??I exercise my mind regularly.â?• It helps that sheâ??s the active president of the San Francisco branch of the Older Womenâ??s League, head of the San Francisco Network Ministries charity and a social activist, championing Black Lives Matter, for example.

Grossman stays occupied with work, reading, classical music and stimulating conversations.

But you canâ??t just exercise your mind alone. You have to engage your body. Physical exercise will also boost your cognitive health, said Ludwig. Grossman walks every day in places where he can see trees, birds and water.

Other keys to a good life in older age include love and appreciation â?? of nature, friends and family â?? spirituality, gratitude and a â??say yesâ?• attitude. Said Hope: â??Stop thinking, â??I used to be able toâ?¦.â??â?•

She encourages people to â??keep a lively connection with people you love and support, and who love and support you.â?• Grossman keeps love alive in his family life. He also keeps a daily gratitude list.

Hope, the first Presbyterian woman in the state of Georgia to be accepted as a candidate for the ministry, maintains â??a discipline of communal worship of The Holy One with prayer and gratitude.â?•

Bottom line, experts agree that one should prepare for the later stages of life with just as much verve as starting a family or helping a child gain independence.

Continuing with a few more of Johnny Mercerâ??s lyrics, Grossman wraps it up:

â??Latch on to the affirmative;
Donâ??t mess with Mister In-Between.â?•

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