LIVING WELL

After 60, Change Is Real but Decline Is Not Inevitable

Your skin, strength and balance may change, but the evidence leaves far more room for action than ageist assumptions suggest.

The mirror tells only part of it

You notice the dry patch first. Then a deeper crease, or a bruise that seems to linger. Perhaps carrying something heavy feels different too. After 60, it is easy to treat every change as evidence that your body has begun a steady retreat. That story is simple. It is also incomplete.

Bodies and minds do change with age. Skin becomes thinner, loses fat and may take longer to heal. Wrinkles, dryness and age spots become more noticeable. Yet many older adults continue to live active, healthy lives. Age can alter the conditions in which you live; it does not dictate one unavoidable result.

This distinction matters because "normal aging" can become a dangerously roomy explanation. A change may belong to aging, or it may signal a medical problem. If something concerns you-especially a new change, a worsening problem or one that interferes with ordinary life-tell your health care provider rather than assuming your birth year explains it.

The useful question is not whether you can stop aging. You cannot. It is which changes deserve acceptance, which deserve attention and which may still respond to what you do next. The available evidence is uneven, but on skin, strength and falls, it gives you a clearer answer than the clichés do.

Skin changes, and sales pitches follow

Skin offers visible proof that time has passed. As it becomes thinner and loses fat, it may look less plump and smooth. Healing can slow. Sunlight is a major contributor to skin aging, while cigarette smoking contributes to wrinkles; wrinkling increases with the amount smoked and the number of years a person has smoked.

That does not mean every jar or supplement promising younger-looking skin has earned your trust. Only a few products have been approved for sun-damaged or aging skin. Some approaches can soothe dryness or reduce the appearance of age spots, but "revitalizing"

language can stretch far beyond the evidence.

Collagen supplements are a good example of why the newest, more critical review matters. A 2021 analysis of 19 controlled trials, involving 1,125 participants who were overwhelmingly women, reported improvements in hydration, elasticity and wrinkles. Read alone, that sounds persuasive.

A 2025 review looked harder at study quality and funding. Across 23 randomized trials with 1,474 participants, the overall results again appeared favorable. But studies without pharmaceutical-company funding found no effect on hydration, elasticity or wrinkles. High-quality studies also found no significant effect. The reviewers concluded that clinical evidence does not currently support collagen supplements for preventing or treating skin aging.

The harder lesson is larger than collagen: an impressive average can disappear when you separate stronger trials from weaker or commercially funded ones. Skin will change. You do not have to turn that reality into a standing order for products whose claims outrun the better evidence.

Your body changes, and not every change has to become decline.

Strength still answers back

Feeling less capable is not the same as being beyond influence. A 2022 analysis of 21 studies involving 1,610 adults aged 60 or older found that resistance training improved upper-limb, lower-limb and handgrip strength. That is preliminary evidence, not a promise, but it directly challenges the idea that strength after 60 can move in only one direction.

The findings extended beyond measured force. Resistance training improved several areas of quality of life, including physical functioning, mental health, bodily pain, general health and social functioning. Depression scores improved too. These results suggest that using your muscles may matter to how life feels as well as to what your muscles can do.

Not everything improved. The review found no benefit for vitality, the overall physical component score, total quality-of-life score or distance covered in a six-minute walk. Its authors said more evidence was needed before drawing firm conclusions. That restraint is important: resistance training is not a universal answer to every physical or emotional change linked with aging.

Still, "older" did not mean "unresponsive" in these trials. Your muscles were not treated as relics, and neither should you treat them that way. If a health condition or physical limitation makes activity uncertain, discuss it with a health care provider rather than borrowing a generic

routine or assuming that doing nothing is the safer default.

A fall is not just bad luck

Falls can be described as though they simply arrive with old age. The evidence paints a more complicated picture. A 2022 review of 34 studies examined 22 possible influences and found that older age was only one part of the risk.

A previous fall, frailty, pain and depression were associated with greater risk. So were cardiac disease, hypertension, diabetes, stroke and Parkinson's disease. Malnutrition, smoking, alcohol consumption, living alone and taking multiple medicines also appeared among the associated factors.

These findings do not tell you that any one factor will make you fall. They identify patterns across groups, and some-such as education level or whether someone lives alone-are not bodily changes at all. That is precisely the point: risk after 60 is shaped by health, circumstances and lifestyle, not age alone.

This is also where the issue stops being a vague lifestyle concern. A fall, a new balance problem, increasing frailty, persistent pain or a change that makes ordinary movement difficult deserves medical attention. Medicines and multiple health conditions may be part of the picture, so guessing at one explanation can miss the wider problem.

Keep the changes in proportion

Healthy eating, regular physical activity and attention to mental health can help you deal with ordinary aging changes and make the most of later life. That is modest language, and it should stay modest. A healthy lifestyle does not guarantee smooth skin, stronger muscles or freedom from falls.

Nor does aging mean you must surrender all influence. The resistance-training evidence shows measurable improvement remains possible after 60, even while leaving some outcomes unchanged. The skin evidence shows something equally useful: visible aging can be real while a heavily marketed answer remains unproven.

You can hold both truths without contradiction. Your body changes, and not every change has to become decline. Some differences may be ordinary. Others deserve assessment. Some capacities may respond to activity. And some products offer a certainty that the better trials cannot support.

For the coming week, make the distinction practical. Notice one change you have been

dismissing and decide whether it is merely familiar or genuinely concerning. Bring a concern to your health care provider. Treat strength as something that may still respond, not something already lost. Protect your skin from strong sunlight, and let the collagen aisle keep its promises to itself.

Where this comes from

- Older Adult Health

  MedlinePlus, U.S. National Library of Medicine · https://medlineplus.gov/olderadulthealth.html
- Skin Aging

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