

# Living 50 Plus



## What Will We Do With Our Time?

What did we really accomplish this past year? We've had time, certainly, with all these lockdown days, weeks and months, to do any number of things.

After reviewing my year of COVID, I realize that I could have done so much more, had I only known just how long "flattening the curve" was actually going to take.

By my calculations, I could have accomplished the following:

\* Painted every room of the house three times. Yet here I sit with color swatches still taped to the wall where I put them last spring when I thought that interior painting would be a good summer project.

\* Written 1.25 novels, judging by how long it took to produce the others I never started. Too many other things to do, too many fun events coming up, I thought. Had I known just how much free, quiet

and solitary time there was going to be, I would have started on Day One.

\* Become fluent in French with Duolingo free online lessons.

I misjudged the coronavirus, seriously misjudged just how long it would be with us. I was certain that it would be gone by June. Then by September. And here we are, 15 months later, still wearing masks and staying home.

I'm determined not to

let another year go by with so little to show for it. I've picked an interior paint color. Now I'll order the paint and go collect it curbside at the hardware store. The first file of a new novel is ready, with "Chapter 1" and a first paragraph. It's a start. My Duolingo account is still there, holding my place where I left off long ago.

It's possible that in a year, we'll be right where we are now. What will you do with the time?



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## Lessons Learned From Buying Online

So many things have changed in how we live our lives in the time of COVID. It's been a year since it all began in earnest and, despite the vaccines, nothing has really gone back to normal. Even small tasks have a layer of "more difficult" on them ... such as buying a new handheld vacuum cleaner.

My little handheld vac began dying after just a short time. I tried to baby it along, but now even with

a full overnight charge, it only runs for 42 seconds before it quits again and wants another long charge.

Used to be I'd go off to a local store, examine several possibilities and buy one. This time I went online, where thousands of selections awaited me, as well as hundreds of reviews for each item. I changed the list to lowest price first. I changed the list to most popular. I searched for only the manufacturer of my

current handheld vac. It didn't help.

Here are some things I learned along the way. If you're faced with making a purchase online and are hit with too many choices, call your local stores and ask what they recommend. Then look up the item online. If an item description (such as for a big fry pan) says it weighs 5.2 pounds, take your current fry pan into the bathroom and weigh it on your scale for

comparison. If you want new shirts and the sizing chart online is iffy, order more of what you already have, but in different colors.

The end result of this saga is that I purchased the same brand and model as my current vacuum. If nothing else, I know it will last approximately 2.5 years, which is right after the warranty expires. But at least I'll know what to expect while it works.

## Simple ways to maintain memory as you age

Adults confront various age-related side effects as they transition from middle age to their golden years. Skin may begin to wrinkle and hair may turn gray, but those are just the visible side effects of aging. Many additional effects are unseen, but those changes can have a profound effect on adults' quality of life.

According to the Mayo Clinic, various parts of the body are affected by aging. For example, the cardiovascular system changes as people grow older. Blood vessels and arteries stiffen as adults age, forcing the heart to work harder to pump blood through them.

Though many changes are linked to aging, other changes commonly associated with aging, such as a decline in memory, reasoning and other thinking skills, are not natural. The Alzheimer's Association®

notes that dementia is not a normal part of aging. There are many different types of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, and these are the result of damage to brain cells that affect a person's ability to communicate. That damage is not inevitable, even if it's commonly associated with aging.

The Harvard Medical School notes that fleeting memory problems experienced with aging often reflect normal changes in the structure and function of the brain. But it's important that those changes not be mistaken for dementia, and it's equally important that adults recognize there are many ways they can protect and sharpen their minds as they age.

• Continue learning. HMS notes that a higher level of education is associated with improved mental

functioning in old age. The reasons for that are unknown, but experts theorize that advanced education compels people to remain mentally active, which in turn helps them maintain a strong memory. Even aging men and women who are still working in challenging fields can benefit from pursuing a new hobby or learning a new skill.

• Use the tools at your disposal. It may seem counterintuitive to suggest that organizational tools like planners, maps and lists can help people maintain their memories. However, HMS notes that expending mental energy on finding car keys or trying to remember what to buy at the store makes it harder to learn new and important things.

• Let all your senses play a role. HMS reports that the more senses a person uses to learn something, the

more his or her brain is involved in retaining a memory. HMS cites one study in which adults were shown a series of emotionally neutral images that were each presented along with a smell. Participants were not asked to recall what they saw, but were later shown a set of images and asked to indicate which they had previously seen. The participants had excellent recall for the odor-paired images, and researchers believe that's because additional parts of the brain were activated when participants were asked to use more than one sense.

Memory loss is not an inevitable side effect of aging, especially for adults who take steps to maintain their memories as they age.

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