An AARP Healthy Living Survey of Adults Ages 50 and Older

When asked about emotional health, two-thirds of older adults ages 50-plus say their emotional health is very good or better; however, when asked about specific emotional health measures, we find many have been bothered by several issues.¹

About six in 10 (58%) rate their level of resiliency as high (8, 9 or 10 out of 10). However, when asked about specific measures of resiliency, a sizable number of older adults struggle with adapting and bouncing back when things don’t go as planned and/or during hardship. For example, three in five (61%) say they tend to bounce back quickly after hard times. However, that means two in five (39%) do not bounce back quickly after hard times.

Nearly six in 10 (58%) say they usually come through difficult times with little trouble. This suggests two in five (42%) do not come through difficult times with little trouble. Similarly, results suggest about two in five (42%) say it takes a long time to recover from a stressful event.

¹ Lampkin, Cheryl. Healthy Living: A look at how older adults are managing their emotional and mental well-being. Washington, DC: AARP Research, April 2022. https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00533.001

This recent survey reveals older adults who are more resilient are significantly more likely to feel they are aging well.
Resiliency, Health and Attitudes about Aging

The majority of older adults ages 50 and older have a positive outlook on aging

As a group, for the most part, the majority of older adults ages 50 and older have a positive outlook on aging. The majority (81%) of older adults ages 50-plus say they are aging well (either they strongly or somewhat agree with the statement) and three-quarters (76%) say they have a lot to look forward to as they age. About three-quarters (73%) also say they believe they will have good health as they age and seven in 10 (69%) say they feel they will continue to make a difference as they age.

Percent who strongly or somewhat agree

- I am aging well: 81%
- I have a lot to look forward to as I age: 76%
- I believe I will have good health as I age: 73%
- I feel confident about aging: 71%
- I feel very optimistic about growing older and aging: 71%
- I feel like I will continue to make a difference in the world as I age: 69%

“"I consider myself a pretty resilient person… Nothing you know, nothing really fazes me; Oh, I'm not fearless, but I you know, I face on a challenge, and you know, I’m pretty tough”

Ricardo, 52
There are some age differences with adults ages 60-plus significantly more likely to say they are aging well, they feel very optimistic about growing older and aging and they feel confident about aging. Those ages 50 to 59 are significantly more likely to say they worry about being treated disrespectfully when they get older.

60+ significantly more likely than 50 to 59 year olds to say

- They are aging well
- They feel very optimistic about growing older and aging
- They feel confident about aging

Some older adults say they do have concerns about aging. While the majority of older adults ages 50 and older express positive attitudes about aging, many also express concerns. Over half (54%) say they have some general concerns about aging with two in five (60%) saying they worry about being able to live independently when they get older. And just over half (53%) say they are concerned that they will lose mental capacity as they age.
Mind over matter: Older adults’ higher resiliency seems to mean a more positive outlook on aging

Regardless of where an older adult is on individual measures of resiliency (e.g., “I have a hard time making it through stressful events.”), there is a relationship between self-rated resiliency and outlook on aging. The chart below shows the percentage of respondents who say they strongly agree with various aspects of positive or healthy aging by reported level of resiliency. We see in every measure those who say they have a high level of resiliency (8, 9 or 10 out of 10) are significantly more likely than those who say they have a medium level of resiliency (4 to 7 out of 10) to also agree they are aging well and have a positive outlook on aging. For example, two in five (42%) older adults ages 50-plus who rate their resiliency high say they are aging well compared to about one in 10 (13%) of those who rate their level of resiliency in the medium range. Similarly, more older adults with high resiliency say they have a lot to look forward to as they age (47% vs. 13%).

Percent who strongly agree by High vs. Medium Resiliency level*

* The number of respondents indicating low resiliency (1-3) is too small for separate analysis (n=68).
Regardless of current health status, most older adults believe they will have good health as they age

Three in five (62%) older adults ages 50-plus rate their current overall health (physical, emotional, mental) as very good or excellent. Interestingly, regardless of self-rated overall health status, the majority of older adults say they will have good health as they age (somewhat agree 55%; strongly agree, 19%). In fact, nearly eight in 10 (78%) older adults who rate their overall health as at least good (scale: poor, fair, good, very good, excellent) believe they will continue to have good health as they age. Even among those who rate their current overall health as only fair, a third (33%) say they will be in good health as they age.

For some older adults ages 50-plus a suboptimal health status does not dampen resiliency levels

How older adults rate their overall health compared to their self-rated level of resilience follows typical patterns you would normally expect. The majority (78%) of older adults who say they have high resiliency also say they are in very good/excellent health and the majority (57%) who say they have low resiliency also say they are in suboptimal overall health. However, a good portion of older adults with high resiliency also have suboptimal health. In fact, one in five (22%) older adults with high resiliency say their overall health is not very good.
It is perhaps this group who exemplifies the true essence of resiliency. Despite their health (or lack thereof) they bounce back quickly and are able to make adjustments. This group may indeed actually have had the opportunity to work their “resiliency muscle” through heightened levels of adversity and as such have come out on the other end even more resilient. It is this group who will no doubt embrace and actually live the concept of “healthy aging” despite any health-related issues they may have.

THE ULTRA RESILIENT? One in five older adults with high resiliency say their overall health is not very good. It is this group who symbolizes the true meaning of resiliency.

“...20 years ago, I had a bout with Guillain-Barre where I went from ideal health to completely paralyzed where I had to learn to walk to again, had to learn to feed myself again. In the space of six months, I had three life threatening situations, Guillain-Barre, had a blood clot, and then a subdural hematoma. I bounced back from all that and kept right on going, and things are fine.”

Thomas, 82

Implications

Experiencing the pandemic has had a negative emotional impact on most of us. This study illuminates where older adults are emotionally right now and how they are managing their emotional and mental well-being. This study also demonstrates that despite the challenges to emotional and mental well-being, most older adults say they are resilient and expect to be able to bounce back from these challenges.
In fact, about six in 10 rate their level of resiliency as high. And as group, for the most part, the majority of adults ages 50 and older have a positive outlook about their aging journey. Nearly three-quarters or more say they are aging well, they have a lot to look forward to as they age and they believe they will have good health as they age. When looking at self-rated resiliency and outlook on aging, we find those who are more resilient are significantly more likely to feel they are aging well—even among those who are not in the best of health.

The 2022 Healthy Living survey highlights how there has been a decline in mental health or emotional well-being for older adults ages 50-plus. Ensuring those who need help can access what they need is critical. This analysis also highlights the relationship between a feeling of resiliency and healthy aging attitudes. This finding is crucial because one can learn how to build resiliency which in turn suggests building a more positive attitude regarding aging which is a key determinant for healthy aging.

**Mental Health Resources**

AARP’s **Mental Health Center** highlights news and resources for older adults’ mental well-being.

The **Disaster Distress Helpline**, provides crisis counseling at 1-800-985-5990 or text: TalkWithUs to 66746.

**Methodology**

The 2022 AARP February Omni was conducted online from February 24 – March 1, 2022 with a total sample of 1,964 adults ages 50-plus (including oversamples of African American/Black (n = 441); Hispanic/Latino (n = 405) and LGBTQ (n = 228). This national survey was conducted using NORC at the University of Chicago’s AmeriSpeak 50+ Omnibus probability-based sample. AmeriSpeak is designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. All data are weighted by age, gender, and race according to the most recent Census population statistics. The margin of error for the national survey is ± 3.33 percent.

The 2022 AARP Healthy Living Qualitative Study was conducted from March 8 - 16, 2022 by ANR Marketing Research Consultants. The 25 in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted by telephone. Participants were recruited by a national recruiting company and screened to be at least 50 years old and to have a variety of demographic, behavioral, and attitudinal characteristics.

For more information on the survey and methodology please contact: Cheryl Lampkin, clamkin@aarp.org

For media inquiries please contact: media@aarp.org.

DOI: [https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00533.006](https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00533.006)