7 MENTAL HABITS that are quietly ageing you

A new grey hair, a couple more facial wrinkles, yes, age is coming for you and the train can't be stopped, but getting rid of some old habits can help, advises clinical psychologist Karen Nimmo.

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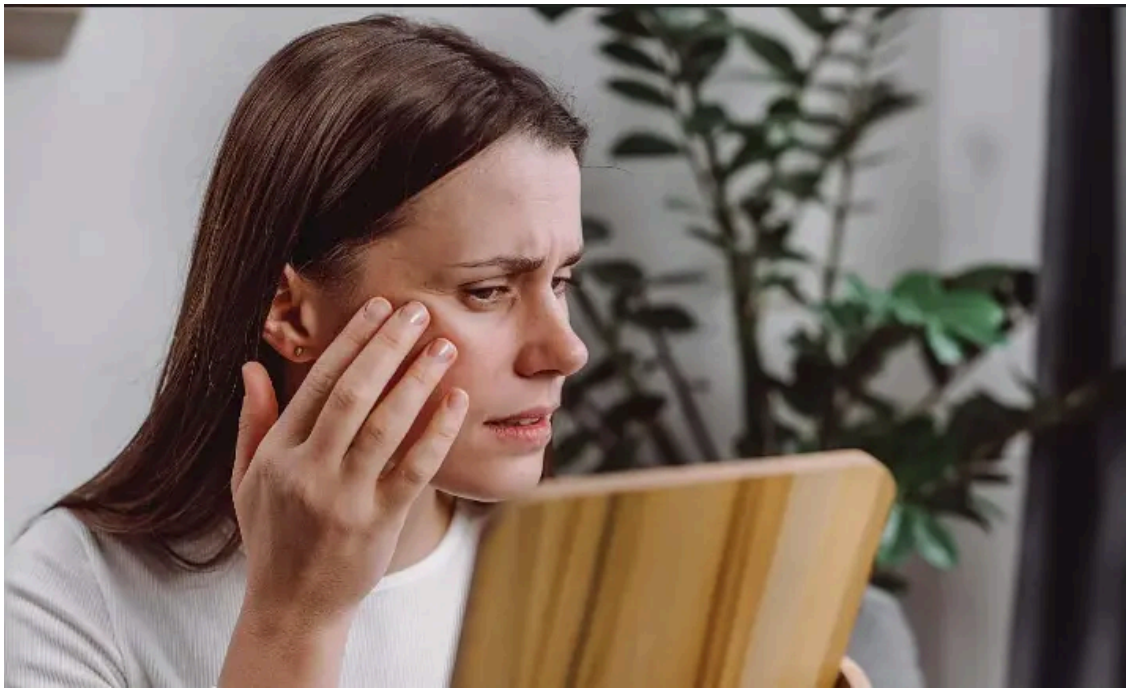
You walk. You eat clean(ish). You sleep eight hours. You stay out of the sun. You don't smoke. You keep an eye on your alcohol intake. But still you can't stop the train. A new grey hair, a couple more vertical facial wrinkles, a little more stiffness when you roll out of bed, age is coming for you.



There's no shortage of information on how to age well physically – much of the $6.2 trillion wellness industry is built on it.

But mental health and fitness is just as important – in fact, it may be even more so when it comes to not just the length of life, but the enjoyment of it.

When we're thinking about introducing new healthy habits, it's useful to first consider the things that are holding us back.

And most of us could do with drilling down on the mental habits that often have become so ingrained that they're part of who we are.

Here are seven that need to go under the microscope, because they (quietly) make us look and feel older than we need to.

Habitual whinging

Politics. The state of the world. The news. Your lazy partner. Your boring job. Money. Your lot in life. Hmmm. It's kind of hard to own this – to call yourself a "whinger" and I admire anyone who does.

But constant negativity carves grooves in your face (literally, through micro-expressions like frowning) and makes you seem older than you are.

Say goodbye to making new friends too, because it makes others turn in the opposite direction.

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Holding a grudge

Grudges belong in the past. Even if you have a (really) good reason for holding one, obsessing over how someon has wronged or hurt you will keep you stuck in your own story. It also prevents you from being fully in the present, which

is where, like it or not, you are living.

Overstaying in a bad job. Ditto for a bad relationship

True, our circumstances, the environment, mortgages, debt, kids, pets – it's sometimes very hard, and scary, to break free.

But any environment that keeps you feeling miserable, resentful or anxious will put extra time on the clock. It withers your spirit too.

So analyse where you're at and build a plan to make change. Even if it takes time, planning for things to be different will help you feel lighter.

Avoiding stress altogether

Yes, extreme and ongoing stress is hard on mind and body. But a little load – doing something new or hard or slightly frightening – is good for us.

A lot of people get to a place in life where they believe they've earned the chance to say no to anything stressful. But stress in small doses is like adding spice or condiments to a meal. It makes life tasty. And it allows you a small thrill – and a sense of achievement – when you make it to the other side.

Hanging out with like-minded people

If these people share your interest in collecting vintage tea towels, it might be a good thing. But hanging out with those who are just like you will just reinforce all the things that you already think, feel and believe. That might feel comforting, but it's a little narrow.

One of the best ways to stay youthful is to mix with a variety of people, young, old, different backgrounds, cultures and beliefs. It forces you to be more tolerant and it affirms an old truth – that it takes all sorts to make a world.

Over-investing in others' opinions (and lives)

Because why? Even your kids, when they get to a certain age, don't need all of your attention, and (well-intentioned) input. Your friends and neighbours certainly don't. We've all heard the saying "live and let live". But to truly absorb it is an art form.

Living small

This is what anxiety and worry does. It makes you try to control everything. It stops you taking risks. It makes you pull the drawstrings of your life in tight, so you live a smaller life than you need to – or should. Best to leave that until old age makes that really impossible, don't you think?

Karen Nimmo is a clinical psychologist.