

# *Lifelong Learning After 50*

## **Overview**

Options for continuing to learn throughout your life.

- Why keep learning?
- Colleges and universities
- Community resources
- Distance learning

Life after 50 can be a time for experimentation and learning, for exploring new career directions, and rediscovering lost interests. More and more colleges and community education centers are realizing that adults at all ages want to keep learning and growing throughout their lives. Many universities and colleges have developed programs specifically for older and returning students.

Learning is a lifelong process, and there are many ways in which you can pursue it. You can attend classes or workshops, join a discussion group, or even attend classes online.

## **Why keep learning?**

In today's job market, many people are finding it a career necessity to keep their knowledge and skills as up to date as possible. Taking a night or weekend class to brush up on your skills can boost your value as an employee. Many employers will help with tuition expenses. Check with your human resources department to find out what the policy is with your company.

There are medical reasons to keep learning, as well. Current brain research shows that we continue to grow new brain cells well into old age. Learning new things helps keep your mind sharp. Many studies have shown that people who stay mentally active -- by reading, taking courses, or by learning new skills at work -- have better memories into old age.

The adult learner is also a wonderful role model for children and grandchildren. Your commitment to lifelong learning shows you value education and that is an important lesson to pass on to the next generation.

If you are not sure what to study, you may want to take a career questionnaire. Go to [www.careerkey.org](http://www.careerkey.org) and do a quick inventory.

## **Colleges and universities**

A good place to start looking for lifelong learning opportunities is at your local community college or university. There you may find a lecture series or continuing education classes for working and retired adults. Many of these classes can be taken for college credit, if you are interested in pursuing a degree or certificate program. You may even be able to earn college credits for life experiences. Some colleges only enroll adult students, so their curriculum

and class schedules are designed for working adults. Also, many universities offer special programs for students of retirement age. These lifelong learning institutes may offer lunchtime speakers and seminars in addition to courses.

### Community resources

If you have a community or adult education center nearby, chances are they offer classes in many subjects, from aerobics to photography. Some classes may meet for several weeks, while others may be for one day only. Many centers also invite guest speakers to give talks on special subjects. There are other places to look for learning opportunities as well.

- *The local Y.* In addition to health and fitness classes, many Y's offer instruction in art, computers, and even sign language.
- *High schools.* In some communities, vocational and academic high schools offer adult education classes in the evening and during summer.
- *The public library.* Check your local library for continuing education programs, such as book discussion groups and visiting lecturers. While you're there, check the library for brochures and course catalogs for other local adult education programs in your community.
- *Hospitals.* Many hospitals offer health-related classes to the community, such as yoga and cooking courses. Hospitals may also host lectures on medical and health topics.
- *Museums.* Most museums have an organization that sponsors activities for people who support the institution. These activities can include guest speakers, special tours, or hands-on art classes. Call your local museums and ask them to send you information on classes and activities.

Some national organizations may offer lifelong learning opportunities close to home.

- *The National Audubon Society.* This conservation organization has nature centers and chapters throughout the country, many of which offer classes and education programs to members and the public. Find a chapter near you at the Audubon Web site, [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org).
- *Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service.* This federal program was established in 1914 under the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The USDA partners with states, communities, and universities to provide outreach and educational opportunities in agriculture, community development, and home economics. 4-H clubs are part of this program. Look in your phone book for your local Extension Service office or visit the Web site at [www.csrees.usda.gov](http://www.csrees.usda.gov).

- ***Elderhostel.*** This organization for people 55 and over hosts learning programs in more than 90 countries. Check the Elderhostel Web site at [www.elderhostel.org](http://www.elderhostel.org) for more information. The Elderhostel Web site also has a searchable database of lifelong learning institutes at colleges and universities across the country.

### **Distance education**

Distance education programs are another alternative for learning. Students in traditional correspondence courses receive educational materials and assignments in the mail. The student completes the assignments within a certain time period, is tested on the material by a local test moderator, and hands in all the work for a grade. Distance education may also take place on the Internet, with students and instructors exchanging assignments through e-mail and discussing subjects in chatrooms. You can check out some of these programs at [www.distance-educator.com](http://www.distance-educator.com), or visit the Web sites of colleges and universities to see if they offer distance learning courses. The American Association of Retired People (AARP) also has online seminars available ([www.aarp.org/leisure/learn](http://www.aarp.org/leisure/learn)) and maintains a link to a free archive of lectures, articles, and seminars provided by Columbia University and a dozen other institutions.

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