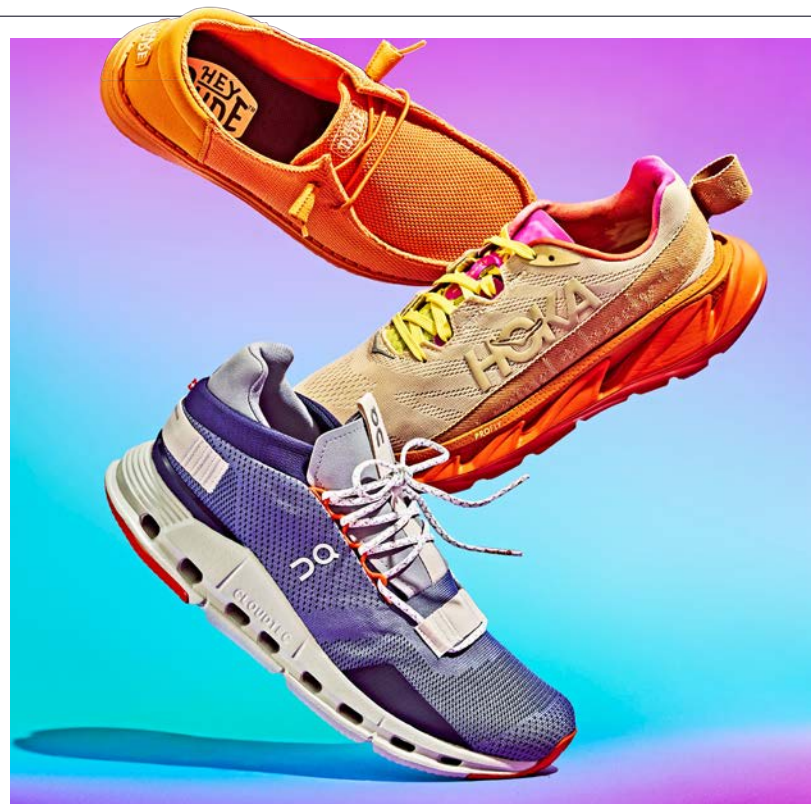


GEN XERS' FAVORITE KICKS

ALL HAIL the cushy sole. Edging out longtime favorite brands, Hoka sneakers have become the most popular athletic shoes among American men in their 40s through late 50s, according to the 2023 U.S. Footwear and Apparel Brand Heat Index. With women in this age group, the Swiss brand On is tops.

"Both brands get the needs of consumers as they age, where comfort moves to the forefront," says marketing consultant Angela Woo, founder of Woo Brand Research. "But appearances still matter to Gen X."

As for casual shoes, HeyDude, which touts its products' softness, led the list for Gen X men and women. —Maisy Fernandez



THE BEST OF ... 'SCHOOLHOUSE ROCK!'

A 50th-birthday nod to the silly—and effective—series of Saturday-morning educational spots, which launched in 1973

5. "The Preamble"

If you can recite the first part of the Constitution, thank this earworm.

4. "Verb: That's What's Happening"

The song's superhero could "take a noun and bend it!"

3. "Three Is a Magic Number"

The lyrics for this gem, the very first in the series, evoked "the ancient mystic trinity."

2. "Conjunction Junction"

This bluesy boogie conjures a gram-marian B.B. King.

1. "I'm Just a Bill"

The GOAT. This tale of a bill that becomes a law has nearly 10 million YouTube views—and inspired a *Simpsons* parody. —Ken Budd

H E L P

CAREGIVING

WHEN DAD'S IT GUY IS YOU

EXPERT TRAINERS say these steps can reduce frustration when your parent gets a new device.

Charge up. Make sure the device's battery is topped off and needed passwords are available before you try to help your parent.

Use your words. Describe features without jargon.

Build on basics. Break down complex tasks into individual steps.

Write things down. Create a cheat sheet for tasks such as navigating to a streaming video service.

Take deep breaths. Learning requires repetition, so be prepared to re-explain and offer hints as your parent masters the device.

—Hongyu Nancy Chen



STAYING ALIVE

NATHAN FILLION AFTER 50

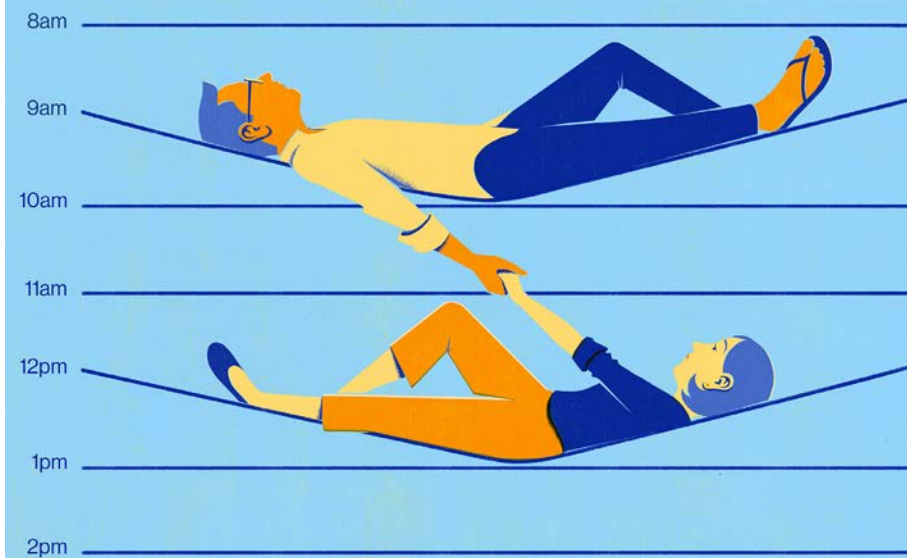
"If you want to get into shape, it takes a lot longer now. Injuries come a lot easier. But at the same time, I'm an expert in everything that is really important to me, and that comes with experience. That comes with trial and error, with mentorship, learning, working and making."

Nathan Fillion, 52, stars in ABC's *The Rookie*. Our full interview, available to AARP members only, is at aarp.org/quickquestions.

Clockwise from top right: Aaron Barton; Stockley; Jamie McCarthy/WireImage; Raymond Liu/ABC via Getty Images; Photofest (2)

Getty Images (2)

Daily Planner



Who Are You Once the Kids Are Gone?

The unexpected—and confusing—perils of a newly empty nest

WHEN GWEN ROWE'S son, August, left for college last fall, she and her husband, Tom, suddenly had a spare bedroom and an empty schedule. There were no more choral rehearsals to drive to or bag lunches to pack, recalls Rowe, 56. *At long last*, she thought, *freedom*.

When Rowe pictured her empty-nest life, she says, "I had imagined Tom and I might travel, explore different cities while working remotely." Or maybe, she thought, the couple would practice the Argentine tango, as they had before their son was born. With their own parents getting older, the Rows talked about downsizing from their three-story house into something more accessible. But then, what if August wanted to move back home later on?

Instead of feeling liberated, the Rows found themselves frozen with indecision. "We've had a hard time figuring out where to turn next," Gwen says.

It's a little-discussed pitfall of the newly empty nest: In addition to missing their children, many parents report experiencing confusion and anxiety about their own lives. They feel stuck and unable to plan.

Jim Burns, now 69, went through it in his mid-50s. A pastoral counselor, Burns had

raised three children with his wife, Cathy, in their Dana Point, California, home. When their last child moved out, Burns recalls, the couple felt "desperation."

"For 23 years, our identity was wrapped around being parents," he explains. "We had to reinvent our own life. How on earth were we going to do that?" As part of that reinvention, Burns wrote the book *Finding Joy in the Empty Nest: Discover Purpose and Passion in the Next Phase of Life*.

Many parents of high school seniors, Burns found, are so wrapped up in getting that last kid through graduation and off to college that they don't spend time imagining what their own lives will look like come fall. In his opinion, "people prepare for retirement or a trip to Italy much more than they prepare for the empty nest."

At least Patti Smith had a head start. When her daughter moved out of the house last October, the Los Angeles-area

life coach, 59, was putting the finishing touches on a book about life transitions called *What Am I to Do Now? Simple Strategies to Navigate the Unknown and IGNITE What's Next in Your Life*. Having worked with many clients in their 40s and 50s, she knew that feelings of loss were a natural part of becoming an empty

MONEY

THE COSTLIEST MISTAKES FAMILIES MAKE



SHOPPING FOR a college is rife with expensive pitfalls. Independent college counselor Dan Bisig, co-author of *College Entrance Game Plan*, reveals the most costly blunders.

Dodging conversations about money.

Starting early in high school, be transparent with your kids on how much you can pay.

Not calculating "Student Aid Index."

Called "Expected Family Contribution" on the old FAFSA form, this stat reveals whether a student qualifies for federal aid.

Expecting free money.

Some schools don't offer merit scholarships; others don't award many need-based grants. Know what it's reasonable to hope for.

Skipping cost estimates.

College net price calculators help with planning, but they vary in accuracy. Bisig prefers College Aid Pro's MyCAP tool (mycap.collegeaidpro.com).

Assuming federal loans will cover costs.

Dependent undergrads can only borrow \$27,000 in federal loans—total. Many parents must also take out or co-sign private student loans, putting their retirement at risk. —Joanna Nesbit

nester. But she also believed that the transition presented an opportunity to recalibrate her own goals.

If you're packing your last kid off this fall—or still feeling discombobulated after having done it earlier—experts suggest these steps for getting on track.

- **Think long term.** You might be an empty nester for far longer than you spent raising kids. What will you do with that time? Think big: "Take up pickleball" is not a plan for what could be decades of life.

- **Pass the baton.** If you're still involved with your children's sports, arts or service organizations, look for a succession plan. It's someone else's turn, Burns says.

- **Mind your marriage.** Going from a family to a twosome can cause unexpected relationship stress, says Karishma Mukherji, a psychotherapist in Oak Park, Illinois, who works with older teens and couples. Any conflicts a couple may have suppressed for the sake of family harmony should be addressed, in therapy if necessary.

- **Strategize going solo.** If you're a single parent, the loss of your teenage partner in crime can hit especially hard. Take the time you need to grieve, but don't be a hermit, advises Coral Springs, Florida, journalist Carol Brzozowski, 64, author of *Empty Nest, Single Parent: Moving the Needle Toward a Repurposed Life*. Getting together with the same people regularly can forge closer ties than spreading yourself thin.

- **Consider a canine.** If you don't have a pet, adopting one offers a lower-stress form of caregiving and loads of affection, says Brzozowski. And a good watchdog adds a sense of security if you're home alone.

- **Walk your talk.** Even though they're out of the house, your kids are still watching you. What kind of behavior do you want to model for them? When you encourage them to take risks and pursue their dreams, "you're telling them that it's a big world out there," says Smith. "Well, it's out there for you, too." —Ellen Ryan

MY FIRST ... STRESS FRACTURE

THREE MONTHS after I turned 50, my left foot began to ache. Within weeks, it hurt so much that I reluctantly sought medical attention.

When X-rays revealed a stress fracture, I asked the doctor how I could have broken my foot without knowing it. "This happens to thin women your age," he replied. Was the word "thin" supposed to compensate for the phrase "women your age"? A dedicated 10,000-steps-per-day walker, I was advised to go easy on the pedometer until I had fully recovered. The doc also suggested getting rid of unsupportive shoes like flip-flops.

Instead, for the following six weeks, I wore an oh-so-stylish black recovery shoe with an unyielding rectangular shape, box toe, plastic sole and Velcro straps across the top. To be honest, the shoe went well with jeans and really wasn't that bad ... until it started squeaking from overuse. Patience was never a virtue of mine.

A bone scan during my convalescence revealed osteopenia, which isn't as severe as osteoporosis but can still make you vulnerable to breaks. When I lamented my body's decline to a friend, she counseled me to be grateful for all



the amazing things my body has done for me and continues to do.

I took that advice to heart. After all, my body and I have done a lot together over its first 50-plus years, including climbing frozen rock walls in Colorado, bicycling through olive groves in Spain and scaling a via ferrata in British Columbia. If I give the old gal a bit of TLC now, I'm only paying her back.

My fracture healed up nicely, and since then, I have taken a more mindful approach to my health and fitness. Instead of rushing through a run or other high-intensity exercises, I'm practicing yoga and Pilates, though I still rock out in Spin classes at the Y. In addition to being kinder to my body, this approach helps clear my mind. And I daresay it's teaching me patience.

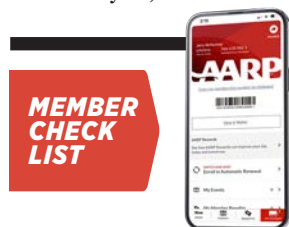
—Susan B. Barnes



TRAVEL ABROAD

Mexico is the top international destination for vacationing Gen Xers, with the Bahamas at number 2 and Italy at number 3. Members of Generation X spend an average of \$5,060 on a typical vacation, second only to boomers.

SOURCE: INSUREMYTRIP DATA ANALYSIS



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