

Allowing Helpful Aging for All

The United Nations, World Health Organization, World Economic Forum, and Global Age Watch have identified *financial*, *social*, and *scientific* (my italics) preparation for population aging as a global imperative. By 2050 World's population of 65 years old or older will reach 20%. Major advances in public health, socioeconomic development, education, and health care have driven these dramatic changes.[\[1\]](#)

Whilst scientific advances are busy in exploring our understanding of aging process that may lead to altering the course of this process, "senolytics"; every effort must be made to keep older people fit and healthy as long as possible, both physically and mentally. The onus starts with self-help with individuals and the state follows with services for the elderly that may further make the aging process as comfortable as possible, adding to healthy longevity.

There may not be any new ideas here, but this article is intended particularly to remind those who have time to think of the years to come, and make necessary arrangements well in time.

Financial security

It is difficult for young people to visualise that time will arrive when they will be aged and feel the need for assistance. Keeping this fact ever closer in our thoughts may help us to prepare better for the inevitable. Financial security in old age is perhaps the most telling factor. Primary function of contributing towards our old age pensions is one way and even mandatory in many public sector jobs. However, with modern trends in most employments moving in the direction of contractual assignments, compulsory savings and accumulation of pensions is declining. The onus is left to individuals to worry about savings for the old age. Well-paying outsourcing jobs in many LMICs may be one example. With the distractions of modern living standards, many people ignore this aspect and find it difficult to put aside sufficient savings for old age. One thing is sure without adequate finances, when one retires from a regular job, basic living and maintaining the same standard becomes extremely difficult, even impossible. Anxiety generated from relative poverty may further jeopardise comfortable retirement. Appropriate nutrition, essential medical treatment, clothing and shelter all cost money and have to be secured in old age to simply survive. Hence, accumulation of sufficient resources is probably the most important aspect of preparing for one's retirement/old age. The earlier one starts, the better it is; young people take note!

Life style

Quality of health, as one gets into later part of one's life is the next important factor in maintaining healthy body as long as possible. Adequate and healthy diet actually improves longevity. However, general affluence along with cheaper and trendy unhealthy foods, modern mechanization and technology has brought certain amount of curse with it, making people indulge in unhealthy foods and much more than one needs.

Increased dependency on fast and processed foods, with leading a relatively inactive life has shown to affect health negatively, resulting in increased tendency to overweight and obesity. Obesity is often a chronic, progressive disorder and extremely difficult to reverse leading to poor health, unwarranted stigma, and increased mortality. In the 2017 Global Burden of Disease analysis, high body-mass index (BMI) increased by 36.7% between 2007 and 2017 and by 127% between 1990 and 2017, one of the highest rates of increase among the risk factors assessed.^[2] Moreover trends in overweight and obesity are being observed at much higher rates among younger adults and children.^[3]

Not only too much of food but excess of sugar, fats and salt in our diet is associated with diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and many cancers which affect later parts of life and shortens it. Smoking, excessive alcohol and recreational drugs are other things which don't do favors to our health. Reduced physical activity coupled with obesity is associated with hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, certain cancers and other musculoskeletal problems. Higher levels of total physical activity, at any intensity, and less time spent sedentary, are associated with substantially reduced risk for premature mortality, with evidence of a non-linear dose-response pattern in middle aged and older adults.^[4] All these measures considered seriously in early life are worthwhile investments for old age.

With modern day scourge of medications and ease of physicians to prescribe it, over-reliance on drugs for any health problems is an easy trap. Medications should be avoided as much as possible, unless life preserving.

Healthy longevity for all will require systems approaches that promote and foster good and equitable outcomes and allow all people to grow old living lives of purpose and well-being.^[1]

Mind over body

Keeping mental faculties sharp as long as possible after retirement is vital. Many people on retirement find themselves with nothing to do, especially those who have been kept busy in routine jobs. Planning for old age as early as possible is an important venture. One can not decide all of a sudden that from tomorrow I am going to change my pattern of life. One needs to work towards this and get used to interesting things that may be sustainable over later years of life. Engaging in interesting hobbies, social service, stimulating physical activities, travelling, meeting people for interaction and entertainment are some of the activities one can think of. I find cooking, bird watching, travelling and evening walks very rewarding. Developing and maintaining my website has given me something to keep myself busy and providing me with a feel-good factor. Similar to financial security for old age, investment in important decisions to engage oneself in alternative interests to one's job can be rewarding in later years of life.

According to Deepak Chopra, You are only as old as feel! life gives you plenty of time to do whatever you want to do if you stay in the present moment. If your mind and body are aging too quickly for comfort, take heed. Shift your perception and create healthy

daily habits so that you can grow younger and healthier as you age.

Chopra further points out *Dos and Don'ts*, meditating is critical because it brings the mind into the present moment, where the body always lives. There is much more to be said about “the power of now,” but the key here is how aging is affected. Finding a way to live in the present moment can be looked upon as a spiritual aspiration, but as far as your cells are concerned, the present moment is where every decision to survive and thrive is made. That should be our attitude also.

DO

- Meditate
- Join a social support group
- Strengthen emotional bonds with family and close friends.
- Take a multivitamin and mineral supplement (if you are age sixty-five and older).
- Maintain a balance of rest and activity.
- Explore a new interest.
- Take up a challenging mental activity.

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- Don't be sedentary—stand up and move throughout the day.
- Examine your negative emotions.
- Heal injured relationships that are meaningful to you.
- Be mindful of lapses and imbalances in your diet.
- Address negative stereotypes about aging and ageism.
- Consider how to heal the fear of death.

References:

[1] Dzau, VJ et al. Enabling Healthful Aging for All – The National Academy of Medicine Grand Challenge in Healthy Longevity. *N Engl J Med* 381;18 October 31, 2019.

[2] Sabine Kleinert and Richard Horton. Obesity needs to be put into a much wider context. *Lancet* January 27, 2019.

[3] Louise A Baur. Defining health risk in children with obesity. *Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*. March 28, 2019.

[4] Ekelund, U et al. Dose-response associations between accelerometry measured physical activity and sedentary time and all-cause mortality: systematic review and

harmonised meta-analysis BMJ 366: l4570, 2019.