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#GOBLUE:



ACTIVE AGING

Ageing is inevitable!

Until recently, much attention has been given to ways of extending our lives. The impact of this, along with a number of other influences (hygiene, nutrition, access to medical care, etc), has had the effect of significantly increasing average life expectancies. In many countries, including South Africa, it has increased by approximately ten years over the last five or six decades.

The focus is now shifting to maintaining quality of life as we get older. 'Active or healthy' aging is the term used to describe the maintenance of positive well-being and good physical, social and mental health. It incorporates continued active involvement in one's family, peer and community groups as well as being able to contribute meaningfully to society.

In 1948 the World Health Organization defined health not as the absence of illness but as the presence of well-being — physical, mental, emotional and social. Being free of disease or infirmity is not a requirement for healthy ageing. Many older adults have one or more health conditions that, when well controlled, have little influence on their well-being. Physical activity, social connectedness, healthy eating, good health practices (such as screening for diseases, adherence to medical plans, having vaccinations, not smoking, watching alcohol intake, etc) have been identified as priority areas to facilitate active aging.

Being physically active can reduce age related decline in function by up to 50%. It contributes significantly to increasing and maintaining independent living, general strength, walking ability and balance. It helps to prevent heart and vascular disease and diabetes and is associated with lower cholesterol, blood pressure and decreased risk of breast and colon cancer. It reduces the risk of stroke and Parkinson's disease and can also help to reduce the symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Exercise needs to be ongoing if it is to be of benefit. Sitting is even referred to as 'the new smoking'. It is encouraging to note that we have the capacity to adapt and improve our balance and get stronger or fitter at

any age, even into our 90s. Exercise should ideally incorporate balance, strength, fitness and flexibility. About half an hour of moderately intensive activity daily is recommended. This can be split into smaller periods through the day. Exercise is even more beneficial if it is enjoyable.

Keeping our brains active is also essential for maintaining independence and reducing the risk of cognitive decline in later life. Examples of activities include playing music, doing puzzles and brain games like Sudoku.

Awareness of any positive emotions or thoughts in the face of life's inevitable difficulties has been suggested as a hidden key to resilience as we age. A healthier emotional state also motivates us to participate in activities that promote our well-being. Poor belief in one's ability, poor coping strategies and depression can have a negative impact. Social leisure activities have been found to be associated with good physical and emotional health.

In summary the chances of successful ageing are greatly increased by remaining active – physically, mentally and socially.

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