

Living Well.....

by Robert Soman, Ph.D., L.C.S.W.

Despite many misconceptions, the fact is that most older persons are self sufficient and able to function either completely on their own or with minimal assistance. Over one-half of the the population 85 and above still functions relatively independently and this age group is the fastest growing percentage of the population in our country.

An important factor determining an older person's ability to continue living in the community has to do with the support system available. Care given to older persons, not in assisted living housing, is primarily given by family members. This care frequently represents the difference between needing and not needing nursing home placement. It is estimated that, for every person over 65 in a nursing home, there may be as many as three people *of similar age and disability* still able to live in the community largely because of the strength of their support system.

In addition to family and friends, there are many other support systems for seniors. Social Security is one of the most basic of these. Medicare and Medi-Cal, with all their shortcomings, have still resulted in basic health care for the elderly. Other parts of the support system include retirement homes, home health services, long term care insurance programs, self-development classes, volunteer activities, Senior and Community Centers, transportation arrangements, specialty health agencies, food distribution centers, and more.

Some of the most recent Gerontological research has given us guidelines to help achieve successful aging:

Keep a positive attitude. We are all faced with disappointments in life. When these occur, accept their reality, carefully evaluate alternatives and then take action based on your assessment. Don't take on the role of victim. After dealing with the problem, get on with your life!

Lead a healthy lifestyle. This involves exercise, proper nutritional habits, minimal alcohol, not smoking, sufficient sleep, etc.

Have a meaningful pursuit or goal. This may involve a job or profession. It may consist of volunteer activities, hobbies, interests or beliefs. It should be something or someone that makes you want to get up in the morning, regardless of the stiffness or arthritic pains you may be feeling.

Continue to learn. Recent research by Dr. Marian Diamond reveals that brain synapses are stimulated by challenges. Therefore the brain works more efficiently if frequently challenged. Allow yourself to be interested in challenges and to meet them with openness and curiosity. This could include



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learning a foreign language, learning to play a musical instrument or operate a computer, or something else.

Make room for loving relationships in your life. It makes life more meaningful if there is at least one other person for whom you care extremely deeply. It could be a mate, family, friends, or all of these.

Reflect on your life and behavior. This helps us overcome our own selfish attitudes and tendencies and see ourselves as others see us.

Well stated in the words of William Allen White: "*I am not afraid of tomorrow, for I have seen yesterday, and I love today.*"

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