

Hope & Healing

Aging Conquering Old Age

A heart at peace gives life to the body — Proverbs 14:30

Introduction _____

If you ask children to draw pictures of "old" people, they will show them in bed and in wheelchairs. Current research paints a far different picture of the possibilities of prolonging our period of vigorous and vital life and shortening our final period of infirmity.

We know enough about the process now to ensure a shorter period of what we usually think of as old age and a prolonged period of adult vigor.

The Span of Life _____

We live with biologic rules, like all animals, and the rule about length of life is this: If you do not die of illness or accident, you will die a natural death when you reach the end of your life span. There are no exceptions to the rule.

Our life span appears to be fixed at an average of about 85 years of age, with an absolute maximum life duration of about 115 years. Deaths due to major diseases of previous years have fallen (smallpox, polio, TB, diphtheria, tetanus, and rheumatic fever) and we can see the results in life expectancy. In 1900, the average length of life was 47 years and most people died of illness or accident. Now, the average is 75 years and rising. The natural life span has not changed, but the average life expectancy is now much greater. If all disease and accidents are eliminated, 95% of our population can expect to live between 70 and 100 years. What is happening even now is an indication of what the future will bring:

- 210 Americans reach age 100 each week.
- 56,000 persons past 65 get married each year. 10,000 get divorced.

- Many older people have children age 65 or older.
- The world had 376 million people over age 60 in 1980. By 2020 the number is expected to top 1 billion.
- The average person will spend 20% of life in retirement.
- More than half of those over age 85 report no physical disabilities at all.

The Good News — You Can Do Something About Aging _____

You can slow your aging. Almost every aspect of aging can be modified by you. You can create a 30 years difference between your actual age and the functional age of your body.

Things You Can't Change:

- Graying of hair.
- Loss of skin elasticity.
- Fibrosis of arteries.
- Far sightedness.

Things You Can Change:

- Physical Fitness — Through exercise, weight control, and non-smoking.
- Heart Reserve — Through aerobic exercises.
- Mobility and Flexibility — Through stretching exercises.
- Blood Pressure — Through weight control and exercise.
- Intelligence — Through practice.

- Reaction Time — Through exercise.

- Isolation — Through socialization.

A Description of Aging _____

Scientists can measure many functions that decline as we age. But that's not aging. Many people who approach old age fear the loss of their memory, and the development of some lingering and painful disease. They fear being dependent on someone else. But, that's not aging, either. That's fear.

And, we have not been well served by the society we live in. The idea that we deserve rest as a reward for a long period of work led to a mandatory retirement age. Unfortunately this only:

- Increases financial dependence.
- Removes the person from the stimulation of new ideas and work.
- Decreases social interactions that prevent isolation.
- Reduces the sense of contribution that affects self-esteem.
- Robs society of a national resource, the value of accumulated wisdom.

Six Principles for Wise Aging _____

Principle 1. Maintain Your Independence. To stay independent you must maintain control of five areas:

- **Your Emotions.** Anticipate problems and move to solve them. Don't allow yourself to think negatively — that nothing can be

done. Prevent the feeling of helplessness by planning the future and looking ahead, no matter your age.

- **Your Money.** Take a hard look at your finances and goals. Don't allow yourself to drift into wishful thinking about money.
- **Your Time.** Use your time more wisely. Learn to get the most from it.
- **Your Relationships.** Strengthen your ties with your loved ones and with your good friends.
- **Your Physical Health.** Actively pursue a vigorous life for your older years.

Principle 2. Moderate Your Habits. If you smoke, quit. If you weigh too much, begin an exercise program and change your eating habits.

Principle 3. Keep Active. There's no substitute for this. Exercise regularly and pleurably, four to six days a week for 50 minutes a day.

Principle 4. Be Enthusiastic. This will require an attitude of youth, a willingness to explore new things and to go new places and to see new people.

Principle 5. Think Well of Yourself. Keep up your appearance, maintain your home, continue your interest in hobbies, work, play. Continue to build your self esteem by being proud of what you do.

Principle 6. Be Yourself. Cultivate uniqueness. Don't do what everyone else is doing just to be doing it.

Five Abilities To Develop _____

Continue to develop your abilities as you age. Here are five specific abilities you can focus on.

1. The Ability To Absorb. Become a person on whom nothing is lost. Be like a sponge. Don't miss anything. Learn to get from the day not just to get through the day. Commit yourself to learning, to absorbing.

2. The Ability To Respond. The ability to respond is the ability to let life touch you. Don't let it kill you, but let it touch you. Be sad with sad things and happy with happy things.

3. The Ability To Reflect. To reflect, means to go back over it again and see what you learned. Go back over a book. Take notes, but, as well, go back over the day, the week, the month, the year, and reflect on what happened so you can capture the essence of the day.

4. The Ability To Act. An idea is only an idea until you take action on it. The time to act is when the idea is hot and the emotion is strong. So, when you're stirred to begin an exercise program, get started before the heat of the moment cools — and then stick with it until it becomes automatic.

5. The Ability To Share. This keeps your heart tender. Pass on a good idea, a book, an experience, a bit of knowledge. Sharing makes you bigger than you are. Expand your capacity for sharing. It will be rewarding.

Summary _____

You must abandon the idea of being "retired" and resting. The future is bright for those who continue to learn as they age. Become more vigorous. Take on a new challenge. Celebrate life up to the day you die.

Awaken the Miracles Within You

The Miracle of the American Spirit

We Americans have our problems but our principles can still guide us if we incorporate them into our practical lives. We should:

- Judge the worth of a person only by his or her character.
- Avoid discriminating against another for reasons beyond his or her control.
- Refuse to be hindered by precedents and traditions.
- Avoid regarding any work as degrading. Prefer independence in plain surroundings over dependency in luxurious surroundings.
- Avoid being dazzled by exalted office.
- Avoid being hypnotized by pretentious titles.
- Believe that any farm boy or any orphan girl, given the opportunity, can become a great citizen.

The recommendations and information in this handout are appropriate in most cases. However, for specific information concerning your personal medical condition, please, consult your doctor.