

## HEALTHY AGING: AN ALARM FOR WOMEN

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**Abstract** - Due to the development in the area of medical science, increase in longevity is observed world wide. Although, with this increased lifespan and the desire for healthy aging, many suffer from deterioration of both mental and physical health, decrease in quality of life and increase in medical expenses. Along with the adequate nutrition and healthy eating, attention should be given to quality life style which includes exercising, yoga, walking, relaxation therapies, coping with stress etc. Adapting healthy life styles has become an essential part of an individual's life so as to process their ageing. Healthy ageing means maximising openings for cognitive, somatic and social health to enable older women to actively participate in society without any discrimination and enjoy an independent and good quality of life. Women globally are required to modify their lifestyle so as to be away from physiological and psychological health issues. There are many clinical studies which focus on the healthy ageing medication and health care for women, but awareness about the easy ways to be a part of society, coping strategies and processing their age in a healthy way still lacks. The present paper is one such attempt.

**Keywords:** Relaxation therapies, Life span, Healthy ageing, Nutrition.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Many health problems are hitting the newspaper daily showing the data related to diabetes, cardiac attack, stress related malfunctioning, osteoporosis, feeling of irritation, anger, tension and many other physical, mental and emotional health issues of women. According to Richard Somely (1994) "Emotional Toxic Waste" is not just a clever metaphor. It is an integral part of modern civilization, whose dominant characteristics is the undertone of anxiety – about the present, about the future – about nearly everything-that is felt at all levels of society. For a woman to cope up with the speed she needs to be active enough and for it certain involvement in societal acts is important.

In this competitive netted world women is struggling hard to achieve maximum possible in all aspects of life and this leads to busy and haphazard lifestyle right from six year girl to sixty year old woman. This busy and hyperactive lifestyle in everybody's life may have some positive instructional effects but may lead to many negative nurturent effects. To hinder these negative nurturent effects to enter in one's life, one should inculcate in oneself the habit of participating in activities, enjoy life and adopting healthy habits like doing exercises, walking and practicing relaxation therapies to reduce age related health issues. Ageing is a natural process; it never decreases ability of a woman to enjoy their life and their ability to make important and valuable contributions to society. Healthy ageing is all about "Optimising opportunities for Good Health" so that every woman who is stepping towards ageing can actively participate in all societal activities and enjoy a sovereign and good quality of life.

### 2. WHAT IS HEALTHY AGEING?

Enhancing prospects for physical, mental and social health to enable growing up people to take an active participation in all the societal activities without any discernment and enjoy stress free life.

### 3. STEPS TO HEALTHY AGEING

#### 1. Social Inclusion and Participation

It's always great to engage yourself in learning new skills. To be a learner is always good and being able to adapt any change at any age is equally important as it protects you against loss of memory. Many of us wish to learn different skill sets earlier in our life time, may be some creative activity, volunteering some NGO, learning to play a musical instrument, making yourself computer friendly, learning to operate smart phone, learning different languages, visiting / exploring different places etc.



## **2. Nurture your relationships**

It is quite visible that now a day many of the older adults live alone, and living alone is the biggest risk factor for loneliness. They get socially isolated after the death of the spouse, retirement or some serious medical problems. They can maintain communication with family members, friends neighbours etc. Regular meetings and outdoor trips or picnics can be scheduled with friends and family. Also, you can visit friends who might be lonely or isolated.

## **3. Physical Activity**

Physical activity is always beneficial. It can reduce the risk of heart diseases, memory loss, improves your appetite and above all you will get a deep sleep after physical workout. Exercise in combination with stress management techniques is extremely important and for those with heart disease can even reduce significantly the risk for a heart attack. As the body attains fitness its ability to withstand stress is enhanced. The heart is able to work harder for longer stretches. The muscles, ligaments, bones, and joints become stronger and more flexible. And the mind is often better able to cope with stress. Joseph (2002) quotes about the studies, which show that employees who follow an active lifestyle need fewer sick, and disability days than sedentary workers. Usually, a varied exercise regime is more interesting and thus easier to stick to. Start slowly. Strenuous exercise in people who are not used to it can be very dangerous and any exercise program should be discussed with a physician. In addition, half of all people who begin a vigorous training regime drop out within a year, so the key is to find activities that are exciting, challenging, and satisfying. Signing up for aerobics classes at a gym can help prompt regular exercise. Because it is so natural and convenient, and brisk walking is an excellent aerobic exercise. Even short brisk walks can relieve bouts of stress. Swimming is another ideal exercise for many people including pregnant women, individuals with musculoskeletal problems and those who suffer exercise induced asthma. Yoga or Tai Chi can be very effective, combining many of the benefits of breathing muscle relaxation and meditation while toning and stretching the muscles.

## **4. Change your way of thinking**

Anything could be seen from different perspectives. The way we feel almost always result from the way we think. We should avoid preoccupations with debilitating negative thoughts of powerlessness, dejection, failure and despair and focus on our strength, victories, etc. As Schwartz (1995) puts it, negative thought if fertilized with repeated recall, can develop into a real mind monster that can not only breakdown our confidence but also can pave the way to serious psychological difficulties. Negative thoughts produce needless wear and tear on our mental motor. Confident successful people deposit only positive thoughts in their memory. This boosts confidence. As already stated, there are many ways of seeing the same thing. Reframing is one of the most powerful and creative ways of doing this. It is a technique used to change the way you look at things in order to feel better about them. As Quina (1989) observes, reframing allows you to step back and take another look. By shifting perspective, a solution becomes possible. For example, look at a glass that is half empty i.e. half full. Reframing does not change the external reality but it changes the perception. Consequently, it helps you to view things differently and less stressfully. The key to reframing, as Geddes and Grosset (1996) put it, is to recognize that there are many ways to interpret the same situation. The perception of half empty glass brings to you is not the same as that is aroused by half-full glass. Instead of fretting over failures, think of little victories and achievements. This way of looking at different episodes of life would contribute positively in our lives.

## **5. Working out changes in habits and behaviour**

Some people by nature have a habit of worrying. When out of control, worry can turn out to be a killer. It can consume our creative energy and make us less effective. Those who are under the clutches of worry should seek to understand what worries them, and try to determine the likely consequences of the problem. They should try to project the worst that



could happen out of the problem and see what you are worried worth its price. The real consequence, as we shall find, would be much less severe than what we think. Thus by conquering our habit of worry we can reduce our chances of being in stress. Some others are prone to stress due to their lack of assertiveness or low self-esteem. The key to assertiveness is verbal and non-verbal communication. People who cannot adequately communicate their needs or wishes will invite several problems for themselves. For instance a person who cannot say "no" to others is likely to be so overwhelmed by external demands that he will not be able to move towards self-fulfilment. Such people should learn to be assertive. Being assertive means standing up for one's rights, expressing one's infringed feeling and beliefs directly, honestly and spontaneously in ways that don't infringe the rights of others. Thus, when we learn to overcome our habit of worrying and pick up the habit of being assertive, we will experience a better disposition in which we find ourselves adjusted and stress free.

## **6. Getting Organized**

To be perpetually disorganized, be it at work or in the home, is a common source of stress. Many people have the habit of procrastination. When we are called upon to do tasks, which are either difficult or boring, we often have a tendency to postpone things until carrying them out becomes a matter of emergency. When the pending cases grow into a formidable height, we begin to view them with an air of torpidity and fear. Tension leads to building up of stress. Such stressful situations can be avoided or at least minimized when people begin to organize themselves and start doing things in a systematic manner. However, we should take care that the pattern we follow not to be too inflexible as to be impractical. If we cultivate the habit of keeping a diary, making lists and prioritising duties, it will help us to avoid stressful situations. In short, if we get ourselves organized and stick to a schedule, it will help us to overcome stressful situation. For most people, learning to manage their time better would solve most, if not all, of their stress problems. We only have a finite amount of time. All it takes is a bit of discipline and organization. Being better organized, working efficiently and wasting less time, are some ways to manage time. Money can be stored; time cannot be hoarded up in the same way. The only way to save time, says Atkinson (1999) is by making the best use of it.

## **7. Ventilation**

Emotions are like steam. As the pressure keeps growing, if it does not find an outlet, the boiler would burst. This is what happens in the case of people who keep things to themselves. Such people carry a considerable but unnecessary burden. There is an old saying that a problem shared is a problem halved. Talking about a problem with others, observe Geddes and Grosset (1996), can be the first step of eliminating it. Whenever we find ourselves in a problematic situation, tensed up and worried, if we can find a few trusted relatives, colleagues or friends, it would be of great help provided we share our problems with them. Often it is not events themselves that are stressful but how we perceive them lead to stress. Apart from conversing with trusted individuals, writing can be a means through which stressful situation can be minimized. For instance, you may give vent to your feelings through writing in a private journal at home or even writing letters to yourself, which should then be destroyed. These are some of the techniques, which we can resort to in expressing the feelings and getting them out.

## **8. Developing a Good Sense of Humour**

Humour is found to be a wonderful stress reducer and an antidote to upsets. Laughter can relieve muscular tensions, improve breathing and regulate the heartbeat. Stress seldom affects those people who are capable of laughing at their problems and at themselves. As Newton (1995) said, our journey through life is a ride in a bullock cart along a heavily rutted road. As we go along such a road, ups and downs are inescapable, but a sense of humour helps us to lubricate the axis on which the globe of ours spins. We must learn to laugh in the face of our helplessness, against the forces of nature, or else we are likely to go insane. Laughter, says Atkinson (1999), is a great releaser of tension and one approved by society, available anytime, anywhere, and free. Atkinson advises us to learn to laugh



honestly at ourselves and half battle with stress is won. Deep tragedy is indeed the best raw material for comedy. It has been observed that most of the world's foremost comedians have turned to humour as a profession to conceal their own sorrow. The traits of humour belong to the family of wellbeing, to the family of wholesomeness, and to the art of relaxation so desperately needed in our times. In short, if we take recourse to humour, it will help to lighten our load through life. In view of its manifold virtues, it is worth cultivating a good sense of humour.

### **9. Well Balanced Diet**

A well-balanced diet not only helps in preserving health but also to reduce stress. Certain food items and drinks act as stimulants to the body. Eating different types of healthy foods can improve your energy levels and help you maintain a healthy weight. Drinks such as coffee, tea, chocolate and coco-cola may bring solace for some time. However, they are harmful in the long run. Such items contain caffeine, which is a strong stimulant that generates a stress reaction in the body causing a rise in the release of adrenaline. Similar are the cases of alcohol and smoking which when used to excess can have many debilitating consequences. Like Caffeine, alcohol can stimulate the secretion of adrenaline producing the same problems of nervous tension, irritability and insomnia. Smoking too is very harmful. Unquestionably, it can cause a variety of cancers especially of the lungs. Similarly, care should be taken not to use sugar, salt, fat, etc. in excess, as they tend to promote adrenaline release, which decrease stress tolerance. In addition to this, one should also develop healthy eating habits, which will ward people off from being easy victims of stress.

### **10. Striking a Balance between Work and Leisure**

It is important to realize that as we have cycles of deep sleep and dream sleep throughout night, we also have cycles through the day. These cycles are called ultradian rhythms because they happen many times per day. There are period of peaks of energy and concentration interspersed with periods of low energy and inefficiency. There is no meaning in working through such periods. If we take breaks during such periods of low energy, stress may not build up. Sleep and leisure are important ways of reducing stress. We should learn when to extend ourselves and when to ease up. Increased stress may lead to increased performance initially. However, once certain point is passed, stress would lead to decreased performance. Perhaps trying harder at this point is unproductive or even counterproductive. Taking break during such periods is quite advisable. Optimizing the balance between work and leisure is an important means of eliminating unwanted stress in our lives. The less the leisure, the more we are likely to be affected by stress.

### **11. Learning to Deal with Conflicts**

Perhaps no one is totally free from conflicts. We may have conflicts within ourselves, with other people and with the organization we work for. When we are under conflict, we have several alternatives to cope with it. Some of these alternatives according to Joseph (2002) are as follows:

- Get locked into a win-lose struggle, come to blows, identifying each other as enemy.
- Compromise by negotiation in which everybody wins.
- Withdraw and walk away from the conflicting situation.
- Engage in creative searches for solution.
- Seek the assistance of third party such as counsellors, arbitrators, etc. in solving the problem.
- Refusing to get involved by being indifferent and finding ways to get around the unpleasant situation.

As we have noticed above, we are left with several alternatives to cope with when we find ourselves in any conflicting situation. Looking into the situation, we may either go for a single solution or a combination of two or more. We need to extricate ourselves from conflicting situations for unresolved conflict is often the cause for stress and distress.



## 12. Learning to Cope with Change

In our lives, we may have to confront many challenging situation. A change in job status, residence, marital relationship, or any other significant areas of our life is always accompanied by stress. Such trying situations might occur in isolation or bunches. Unless we learn to overcome such situations stress is sure to occur. The following two tips can help us in overcoming such situations:

- a) Keep the eye on long-range goals and values.
- b) Accept the fact that our life will change constantly and practice adapting to it. We have to learn to make an adventure of adjusting to new situations, and challenges.

Unless we take such situations in the right spirit and learn to accept them as challenges and opportunities to grow, we shall shortly become subject to stress and distress.

## 13. Learning to Handle Criticism Gracefully

Facing criticism, especially if you are in authority, is a common phenomenon. Some handle criticism excellently well while others do not. While facing criticism, most people handle it unproductively or rather in a counterproductive manner. They try to avoid it either by pretending to not hearing it or by changing the subject. They may either deny it or come out with a hundred excuses by way of rationalization. They may even try to strike back saying that their critics are worse than they. These are not the right ways to handle criticism, as they are attempts at defensiveness. They do not solve the problem.

A better way to manage criticism is given by Qubein (1983) and it is as follows:

When faced with criticism:

- Ask for details.
- Find which specific behaviour of yours is in question.
- If criticism is correct, agree with it.

In case you find the criticism incorrect, agree with the person's right to see it differently. The above way of managing criticism helps to avoid sterile conflict.

## 4. MANIFOLD ASPECTS OF AGEING

### 1. Molecular (Telomere length, DNA instability, epigenetic alterations):

At this level, ageing is defined by Telomere attrition, which is supposed to determine cellular lifespan. The other molecular factors responsible for ageing includes DNA instability and epigenetic alterations, which in turn can result in deteriorating cell function.

### 2. Cellular (Deregulated signalling, mitochondrial dysfunction, senescence):

The decline in cellular function takes place because of the altered intercellular communication, cellular senescence and organelle dysfunction. These changes are evident at physiologic level.

### 3. Physiologic(Inflammation, insulin sensitivity):

The changes in cellular level results in flam ageing (chronic inflammation), changes in body composition, neuronal function and breakdown of energy.

### 4. Functional (Sensory, balance, strength, cognitive, cardiovascular):

Ageing also gives rise to changes in sensory functions that includes change in visual, auditory, taste, smell and even poor appetite. As we grow old cognitive changes also aid as predecessors to Alzheimer's and dementia. Sarcopenia is another age related weakening in skeletal muscle mass and physical function that results from convergence of prolonged inflammation, hormonal changes and cellular malfunctioning, less physical activity and poor diet.

### 5. Chronic Disease(Heart disease, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, cancer, osteoporosis):

In addition to all the above said diseases, ageing also gives rise to an increased risk for many other chronic diseases, including heart problems, cancer and diabetes in elderly women.





## 5. CONCLUSION

Ageing as clear from its name is a steady weakening of all the three domains ie. The decline of cognitive, affective and conative domains. It affects everyone in some or the other ways, with the different range in age associated with somatic and cognitive operations. On the other hand healthier ageing can be attained by modifying the lifestyle by opting for making a habit of daily exercising, eating a nutritious food ie. a balanced diet, being more physically active and away from drugs, alcohol and smoking.

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