

INSTITUTIONAL CARE FOR THE ELDERLY: POSITIVE AGEING

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Positive ageing focuses on the emotional and psychological aspects of ageing. It recognizes how our negative beliefs, thoughts, ideas and attitudes can have a detrimental impact on physical and emotional well-being as we age.

Life expectancy has increased so much in recent years that most people can look forward to at least twenty years of life after retirement at 60. We can benefit a great deal by looking at our attitudes towards ageing, and our plans for this extended period of our lives.

There will be challenges. Nevertheless, we must believe that there are a number of personal development techniques which can help us all to develop resilience and strengthen our sense of choice and control.

Physical well-being

This includes daily exercise for at least 30 minutes. Aerobic exercise is good for the brain, and strength training for the bones and muscles. In an institutional set-up, this can be organised through creating walking trails, however small their length and breadth. Ensuring that residents walk for 25-30 minutes a day would guarantee that their physical health is well maintained.

The Brain

Engage in mentally challenging activities. Never stop learning new things. Look for opportunities to keep the brain active. The Heritage Foundation, Hyderabad, for instance, has plenty of opportunities to engage senior citizens in. Computer courses here are so popular that a few thousands of the elderly have been trained to operate computers. Quiz programmes in groups can be another activity. Playing chess and board games that demand no physical energy are a few activities that plenty of institutions for the elderly can handle.

Lifestyle Changes

Maintaining normal body weight, eating healthy food in small quantities, not smoking, drinking alcohol in moderation, and good sleep play a significant role in positive ageing. At a workshop run for the elderly by the Heritage Foundation, participants explained how their institutions maintain a garden tended to entirely by the residents. In another old age home, senior citizens get involved in performing a variety of chores, including cutting vegetables, cooking for all, doing their own laundry using the washing machine, supervising housekeeping services, and organising events. The residents feel involved, as a consequence, and see a rich purpose in life.

Networks

Nurture relationships with the spouse or partner, family, friends and neighbours. Reach out to people, including younger ones. Stay involved in your community. The welcome practice of celebrating the birthdays and wedding anniversaries of residents in old age homes and day care centres is gaining momentum today. Such events keep the elderly productively engaged in organising and conducting them.

Have goals in life and take control of achieving them, which gives you a sense of accomplishment and pride. At a particular facility, a male resident, aged 70, looks after his 65-year-old wife (suffering Parkinson's disease for over twenty years now) and his widowed 94-year-old mother, apart from managing other family matters. He makes the time to learn languages despite his hectic caregiving demands. He goes for a ten-kilometre walk daily, visiting the local deity in a temple. He feels a sense of accomplishment and worth. He assists the resident manager when the need arises.

Minimize stress. Learn to unwind. Many studies have revealed that senior citizens feel distressed that their children are not around anymore to take care of them in their twilight years. More often than not, the parents themselves have encouraged their children to pursue higher studies, either in their hometowns or elsewhere. Thereafter, the children migrate and settle down there with families of their own, following which it is no longer possible for them to give their parents the undivided attention they expect. Senior citizens need to accept this

hard fact and learn to live without expectations, focusing their attention instead on living actively/productively as a community.

Health screenings and engaging in preventive health behaviour are vital. Preventing poor health can keep the mind and body fit and enable the elderly do things they could not earlier. Several discounted/free health screening options are available, which the elderly can put to good use. There are hundreds of mobile health screening facilities offered by NGOs in rural areas to assist those living in remote and rural India as well.

Heritage Eldercare Services at Hyderabad has adopted the following programmes to promote positive ageing:

1. Dance performances in groups comprising multigenerational members,
 2. Regular picnics,
 3. Celebrating festivals and national days such as Republic Day and Independence Day,
 4. Volunteers' bureaus
 5. Moonlight dinners, and “Second Career” workshops and placement centres.
- Whether writing a book, volunteering or helping, it is re-employability at its best and, therefore, productive and positive ageing.
 - Age is an attitude, and it is up to the individual to use the experience innovatively.

Researchers have discovered that one of the biggest causes of Alzheimer's disease is an inactive brain. So why be quiet?

Grandparenting is easily available, as long as seniors don't force their values on the next generation. Home maintenance, attending lectures of various kinds, meditation or yoga, or exercising to keep the body healthy are just a few options to pick from.

The visibility of active ageing is seen when the elderly dance to the tunes of yesteryear's music. All that is needed are

- The music,
- A festive mood to be created, and
- Exuberance, adding charm to wrinkled faces.

For those interested in photography, capturing and freezing life comes easy. Photography needs creativity and with that comes adventure, no matter what the age. To quote 70-year-old Rao, “For me, adventure works a magic spell, and I always depend on the creative side of my brain to do the thinking for me.”

Shaheen Moidu, at 70-plus years, runs a school after a visit to the US where she observed that even 90-year-olds live alone and do all their work themselves. She teaches children from the slums and provides them education for free. Besides, she does everything else too - cooking, knitting, gardening and socialising.

For Pramila, “Individuality stood me in good stead.” She is a voracious reader, and keeps herself updated with the latest happenings in and around the country. She loves crossword puzzles and ensures that her home is spick and span. She picked up computer skills so she can not only email family and friends but also learn new and interesting things as well.

Capt Manohar Sharma, former Hyderabad Ranji Trophy cricketer, celebrated his 75th birthday in 2015. To him, age matters nothing and he continues to remain very active. He managed an Indian cricket team on tour, brought out a book titled “Humour in Cricket,” and has been president of the Uma Nagar Colony for more than a decade, and is still actively involved in civic activities.

A lifestyle choice, exercise, diet, living arrangements and social networks determine the quality of life. All of these are under the control of senior citizens and can be had to the fullest, without having to depend upon others!