

## PRINCIPLES FOR HEALTHY AND ACTIVE AGEING



Ageing of human body is a continuous process throughout life right from the day one but it assumes greater importance from health point of view once you are approaching old age. In old age there is not only a greater concern about problems of health but also about problems of financial and psycho-social aspects all of which have a direct or indirect influence on the person's health. Since the elderly population is rapidly rising all over the world, the society is increasingly facing multidimensional challenges of old age. Many older adults suffer from life threatening diseases like high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, cancer, and infections like pneumonia and mental diseases like Alzheimer's disease. However, a much larger proportion of old age population spends their last years of life with poor quality of life due to other health problems which are not necessarily related to any of these diseases but due to their old age itself. When such problems occur not because of diseases but simply because of old age, these are usually not life threatening. Table-1 shows some common life threatening diseases and nonlife threatening symptoms of old age in an alphabetic order.

TABLE-1. COMMON PROBLEMS DUE TO OLD AGE

LIFE THREATENING DISEASES		NON LIFE THREATENING SYMPTOMS	
A	Alzheimer's disease	A	Aches and pains in the body
B	Brain attack i.e. paralytic stroke	B	Blurred and reduced vision
C	Cancer of some body part	C	Constipation and difficulty in passing stool
D	Diabetes or sugar disease	D	Depression and loneliness
E	Essential high blood pressure	E	Exhaustion and reduced fitness
F	Frailty- (weight loss, gait problem, fatigue)	F	Forgetfulness in old age but not Alzheimer's
G	Geriatric infections (infections in old age)	G	Gas in stomach or flatulence
H	Heart disease and heart attacks	H	Hearing impairment
I	Injuries and falls	I	Insomnia i.e. disturbed sleep

Treatment for every disease listed in the left side column of the table is often different. Once a disease has emerged or progressed, you often need costly treatment by drugs, tests and sometimes operations like heart stents, joint replacement, and kidney transplant or cancer surgery but preventive methods on the other hand are often more or less the same for most of these ailments and are cheap and cost effective. Old proverb "**prevention is better than cure**" should be reworded as "**prevention is better as well as cheaper than cure.**"

As far as common old age symptoms in the right side column of this table are concerned, they may not be life threatening but they can still be very uncomfortable to the individual and can seriously compromise their quality of life. Individuals however, need not be scared of them except seek the required relief from their doctors and ensure from them that these are due to normal ageing only and not because of any serious diseases. They can also be largely prevented by simple steps.

In this article, general principles of life style to prevent and control many of these diseases and symptoms of old age have been highlighted. No attempt has been made here to provide any advice regarding medical treatment of these problems. These principles should be regarded as information material for general awareness only. Reader is advised to contact the medical practitioner for any medical advice in individual cases.

We cannot influence the effects of genes, gender, culture and ethnicity on health and longevity but we can definitely prevent many health problems by properly taking care of our own selves. Practicing of these self-caring principles should be the work of a life time and there is no short cut to longevity. Nevertheless, doing such practices become hugely more relevant in later years of our life for maintaining good health and aspiring for long life. Following are these self-care practices:

### 1. Personal hygiene

- i) **Personal cleanliness:** includes teeth brushing, bathing, changing clothes, frequent hand washing, combing hairs and caring for the nails and feet etc. Such steps protect us from infections and at the same time give us a sense of dignity and self-esteem. Some of these practices are acquired right from the childhood and others are picked up as the life progresses on.
- ii) **Bowel movements:** These must be ensured at fixed regular timings during the day. Constipation is a common problem in elderly but it can be avoided by taking high roughage and fiber diet, drinking adequate amount of water and physical exercise. If there is sudden change in bowel habit it should be reported to the health care provider. Injudicious use of laxatives should be avoided.
- iii) **Sleep hygiene:** Sound sleep is useful for good health. It reduces the chances of high blood pressure, high blood sugar, dementia, depression etc. A sound sleep implies an undisturbed sleep for 6-8 hours. A sound sleep can be ensured by several measures such as keeping a gap of at least 1-2 hours between dinner and bed time, avoiding radio and television at bed time, avoiding day time naps, adequate daily exercise, a calm atmosphere and soft light in the room, and by observing food discipline and avoiding coffee, tea and alcohol close to bed time.

### 2. Healthy life styles:

These are summarized in the following table 2

TABLE 2: HEALTHY LIFE STYLES

Satvikta	Vegetarian balanced diet without addictions
Shramta	Physical work and different forms of exercises
Sakriyata	Active involvement with life and events
Samparkta	Social enrichment or social fulfillment
Sadacharita	Ethical conduct and positive attitudes

- i) **Satvikta:** Healthy food and a balanced diet protect us from many diseases and keep us fit. Vegetarianism is a recognized way of Indian life since centuries. Fruits and dark skinned vegetables, adequate liquids, proteins, vitamins and calcium containing foods need to be consumed. Intake of vegetables and fruits is good to avoid constipation and helps in control and management of disorders like diabetes, heart disease, stroke and hypertension. This also provides protection against cancer. One should use only moderate amount of salt and sugar and low fat with predominantly unsaturated fat (vegetable source, no animal red meat fat). All addictions are bad for health. Particularly notorious is cigarette and bidi smoking or tobacco chewing. Smoking or tobacco chewing is a huge risk factor for heart disease and cancer of various parts of body especially of the lung. Alcohol consumption is also bad for health as it promotes heart disease and liver cirrhosis. It is bad for brain as well. Prolonged fasting and overeating should be avoided.
- ii) **Shramta:** Someone rightly said if exercise could be dispensed as a pill, it could have become the most precious prescription for health. Exercise could be in the form of occupation, household or transport related physical work but planned and regular exercise during leisure time is always useful & desirable

Regular exercise has multiple benefits. Exercises can be of aerobic and weight bearing types. Examples of aerobic exercises are moderate to brisk walking for 30 minutes daily for at least 4-5 days every week i.e. a total of 150 minutes a week. This helps in preventing and controlling obesity, diabetes, heart disease, osteoporosis and fall related injuries and even certain cancers. It helps us enhancing sleep and quality of life and keeps us away from depression and dementia. It gives an overall feeling of mental, physical and social well-being. Other aerobic exercises are running, swimming, cycling, dancing etc. Examples of weight bearing exercises are weight lifting, chair sit ups and climbing stairs. Clapping and laughing loudly are also supposed to be useful. Finally, it is always advisable to have doctor's approval for any exercise in case of patients with heart and other serious diseases.

- iii) **Sakriyata**: is active involvement with life and implies active engagement in mental and physical activities other than traditional exercises. This could be in the form of pastime and hobbies like gardening, indoor sports, playing with or tending the grandchildren. Reading new material, solving crossword puzzles, computer activities and all other practices which involve stressing the brain are also useful for healthy ageing.
- iv) **Samparkta**: means social enrichment and is also very useful for mental and social health. It can be in the form of social networking, gossiping with friends and relatives, travelling for pilgrimages, enjoying club memberships and other social organizations and associations, attending social and religious functions and related events in routine life.
- v) **Sadacharita**: implies ethical conduct, positive attitudes and spiritual behaviour all of which promote well-being and mental relaxation and thus contribute to health. Positive spiritual beliefs help tide over the despair of old age decline, bereavements and other challenges. They contribute to risk reduction for cancer, cardiovascular diseases, depression, and cognitive impairment and prolong active life. There are reports of their usefulness even in emphysema, cirrhosis, pneumonia and attitudes towards death and dying. It may be mentioned that spiritual qualities can be inculcated and strengthened by procedures like yoga and meditation. For the same reasons, practices such as doing prayers, listening to divine songs and religious discourses are also useful.

### 3. Self-care by accessing medical support:

Self-care also includes visiting your doctor at periodic intervals for health check-up at least once a year. Apart from monitoring the treatment of an ailment that you may already be having, a good doctor will also give you a thorough medical examination and the necessary laboratory tests to detect any hidden disorder. He would also check and monitor all your medications you may be regularly using. A doctor expert in old age care would also assess you for your teeth, nutrition, urinary problem if any, depression and for physical and mental disabilities like impaired vision, mobility, hearing, and memory during your health check-up and take corrective actions if needed. You should also enquire from him about the need of any vaccination especially the pneumococcal and flu vaccination. It may be emphasized that any abnormal feature like lump in the breast, recent change in the bowel habit, persistent cough or unusual bleeding can be an indication of malignancy and should prompt you to visit your doctor immediately.

### 4. Miscellaneous self-care steps

- i) Elderly people may be on many drugs owing to number of diseases present in them. Drug-related problems are therefore common in the elderly and include drug ineffectiveness, adverse drug effects, over-dosage, under-dosage, and drug interactions. Because it is common for elderly to take drugs in wrong doses due to memory and vision problem they should be cautious. Self-medication of non-prescription and over the counter medicines is especially risky in older persons.
- ii) Avoiding pollution, smoke and dust and avoiding extremes of weather and also opting for well ventilated house is also important for health.

- iii) Accidents and falls should be prevented by avoiding extrinsic factors such as poor lighting in the house, lack of railing support on stairways, slippery and wet floor in bathroom and avoiding road accidents.
- iv) Older adults should limit or give up driving if their vision, reflexes, or overall function is poor. They should not drive when they are taking drugs that cause drowsiness, and they should not drive at night if their night vision is poor.

अखिल भारतीय कुलश्रेष्ठ संघ

अखिल भारतीय स्तर पर संघ बना अभिराम है ,  
अखिल भारतीय कुलश्रेष्ठ संघ इस संस्था का नाम है ।

पुनः जाग्रति की ओर अपने कदम बढ़ा रहा यह ,  
चित्राभ पत्रिका से सबकी प्रतिभा को जगा रहा यह ।

चँहमुखी विकास करें हम, यह संघ का अभियान है ,  
खेल, संस्कृति और श्रद्धा का मिश्रण देता ज्ञान है ।

स्नेह आपस में हरदम बना रहे , संघ का यही पैगाम है ,  
पूरी श्रद्धा और भक्ति से होता चित्रगुप्त जी के पूजन का काम है ।

बच्चों की प्रतिभाओं को निखरना इस संघ का काम है ,  
बडें-बुजुर्गों का हरदम रखता मंडल मान तथा सम्मान है।

चित्रगुप्त जी की कृपा से जारी रहें लगातार संघ की प्रगति हर वर्ष  
आप सभी महानुभावों का साथ रहे संघ के साथ सहर्ष ।



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