

HEALTHY AND LONGEVITY STRATEGIES

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Should we wait to bear the exorbitant cost and discomfort of age-related diseases or should we also prevent them from happening in the first place to achieve a long and healthy life. This can be done through what is called **healthy aging**, a determinant of well-being and a panacea against most disorders of old age provided it is practised through the life course approach. Yet, it is never too late to begin; earlier it is begun, better it is. Eating proper, exercising well, sleeping full, busting stress and avoiding tobacco and alcohol are the well-known physical steps of healthy aging. However, less discussed are the invisible approaches to healthy aging like challenging the brain, engaging for social enrichment, having a right attitude towards aging and utilizing our sixth sense that is spirituality. These invisible approaches are briefly outlined below.

(i). **Challenging the brain:** It is not just that a healthy body begets a healthy brain. A healthy brain also begets a healthy body and hence the importance of keeping the brain active as much as keeping the body active. Accomplishing a new task like learning a musical instrument, Befriending and playing with young, Creative activities and hobbies, Dominant and non-dominant both hands usage e.g. knitting, Exploring the internet, Fun with puzzles and crosswords, Gardening including planning a garden, Healthy humouring and jokes, Imbibing a new language are some of the brain stimulating exercises. .

(ii). **Social enrichment:** A friend in need is a friend indeed is the well-known old adage. Blessed are those who have a strong social networking relationship, close bonds and friendships as they are the scientifically proved beneficiaries of healthy and active aging. Hormone, oxytocin often nicknamed as bonding hormone, love hormone, cuddle hormone, or trust hormone has been loosely associated with rich socializing behaviour. In the medical jargon benefits of socialising behaviour are equivalent to those of smoking sensation and obesity reduction.

(iii). **Right attitude:** Fatalistic attitude towards old age and aging is quite pervasive among older adults, families and societies particularly among the ignorant and uninformed segment of population. Staring at the brevity of remaining life, such people tend to connect every ill in their life to the aging process and therefore fail to access any social or health care resulting in poor quality of life devoid of healthy aging. Transformation of such an attitude through mass awareness and providing dignity to their life is an avenue for active and healthy aging.

(iv). **Spirituality:** Last but not the least, an invisible approach to healthy aging is spirituality, a sense additional to the well-known five physical senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste) and which I call as the sixth sense. Nothing physical about it and difficult to explain, it is this sixth sense through which we understand our surroundings, comprehend the World and even the Universe and perceive the meaning and purpose of life by utilizing the additional power of our non-physical structure that is our Mind. **There are four levels through which man can be spiritually active namely, Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Environmental/Natural and Transcendental** and all these four routes impart significant and scientifically proved health benefits. Generally, decrease of stress hormone (cortisol) and inflammatory markers (CRP, interleukin-6) and increase of happy hormones (melatonin, endorphins) resulting in the

improvement of immune, cardiovascular, neurological and endocrinal function are considered as some of the basis of many of the known health benefits imparted by spirituality. Others have reported a favourable increase in brain Gamma Amino Butyric Acid (GABA) which is useful for mental health.

Intrapersonal spirituality implies strengthening of ethical conduct and spiritual traits (like forgiveness, optimism, resilience, gratitude, introspection, veneration, empathy and countless others) by practising Ayurvedic principles, Pranayama, Meditation, Yoga, Worship and Praying etc. **Interpersonal** level of spirituality means relating to others through forging compassionate linkages with them and practising altruism on the assumption that each man is sent here to help others. Role of oxytocin as the bonding hormone was already referred to above under social relationships. Although **Environmental** exposure to spirituality paradoxically implies usage of physical senses such as *sighting* colours, religious symbols and natural surroundings like green and blue spaces, sunrise etc., *hearing* devotional discourses, bhajans, bird chirping etc., *smelling* the aroma and fragrance of incense sticks, flowers, plants etc., *touching* the devotional and Nature's objects and *tasting* the spiritual foods. some of these are perceived through non-cognitive pathways and are health friendly even for patients in advanced stages of dementia. The last level of practicing spirituality is **Transcendental** which means connecting the self with something beyond human e. g. Cosmic force, God or some contemplation method.