

Ageing healthily

Why is it that some of us live longer, happier, healthier lives? Many people are fatalistic and believe that they can only play the hand with which they were dealt. Others, like me, believe that we can put years into our lives and life into our years.

There is really good evidence that people's habits put them at risk of sliding down the slippery slope to poor health and an early grave. And there is also really good evidence that adopting healthy habits, at any stage of our lives can put quality and quantity into our lives.

Lets see how many of the 8 steps to healthy ageing that you are managing so far:

1. Eating too few fruits and vegetables and too much animal fat is linked with cancer. Aim to have a balanced diet. You could opt for the Mediterranean diet, a low GI diet or the FAST diet.
2. Get a social life. Having family, friends and carers makes all the difference. Being involved avoids loneliness, depression and other mental health issues including alcohol and drug misuse. Doing some of the other things in this list will often trigger a more active social life.
3. Physical activity is almost a panacea! It protects against cancer, heart disease and diabetes and keeps arthritis at bay. What more could you want? Tai chi is brilliant for treating fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue. Swimming isn't just for fish. If pedal power appeals: Those with side-burns might like to try to emulate Wiggo, whilst us bald folk could set our sights on Froome's achievements. More reasonably perhaps you could take a dog out for a walk regularly or if you're addicted to Coronation Street an exercise bike might allow you to multi-task.
4. Learning or developing skills can lead to a great deal of satisfaction, a better social life and the possibility of sharing your skills with others or helping your community and yourself. Selfishly, it will put quality and quantity into your life. Have you ever wanted to be able to do something and never previously had the time? Perhaps you could figure out how to tweet or how to use a spreadsheet? Now is the time.
5. Get out more. Your council may help by improving access to the country or public spaces. Sunlight gives you vitamin D. Getting out makes you less isolated and is good for your sanity and body.
6. Knowing how to get help. Voluntary services such as AgeUK and the Carer's centre can provide invaluable services and information. They can facilitate a healthy change in the way that you lead your life after retirement or as your relatives, or yourself, become more dependent. Why not give them a call?
7. Use new technologies. Why not ask a young relative to get you online or to help you to use the self check-out at Tesco's? AgeUK and other local voluntary organisations such as ShARP offer courses as does the local council via the library.
8. Employment and volunteering. Now is the time to think about working in the way that suits you. I chose to volunteer through Voluntary Services Overseas in Tanzania before settling down to be a GP. Although the pay wasn't good it counts as one of the most

satisfying things that I have ever done. You don't need to go so far afield to get something out of volunteering. AgeUK, ShARP and Jobcentreplus and Remploy can guide you to fulfilling voluntary work.

My wife tells me that some people look as if they've had a hard paper round. She is describing how some people put on the years by smoking, drinking, eating unhealthily or losing touch with society or activities.

AgeUK. www.ageuk/Sunderland Carly on 514 8324 or Janice on 5616385

Carer's centre www.sunderlandcarers.co.uk 0191 549 3768

ShARP www.shineyadvice.org.uk 0191 385 6687

Jobcentreplus tel:0845 604 3719

Remploy www.remploy.co.uk 0845 155 2618