

ABSTRACT

ACTIVE AGEING

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It is the dream of any human being to live longer, but at the same time we all wish that old age should be free from all sufferings and we should never become a burden on our near and dear ones. How far can this wish be fulfilled?

WHO has chosen 1999 as the International Year for the Elderly. The theme of the year is "ACTIVE AGEING MAKES THE DIFFERENCE".

The preparation, for leading a healthy youth and an active old age, should start before birth. Only a healthy mother can give birth to a healthy child.

The nutritive and healthy environment of the foetus in the uterus before birth is a major determinant of the future vitality and vigour of the individual.

All females of the child bearing group should receive optimum vitamins, minerals and total calories in the diet. Children should be immunised so that they are protected against the deadly vaccine preventable diseases in the absence of which, when contracted, results not only in death but leaves the person with a life long disability.

Exposure of the pregnant women to the environmental tobacco smoke is now proven to result in multiple organ dysfunctions of the child. Passive smoking by the pregnant women because of inevitable inhalation from the husband who smokes, not only predisposes the child to respiratory illness like asthma, but also results in impairment of intelligence.

Cessation of smoking is an invaluable decision and it is never too late. It is true that years of smoking can produce irreversible changes in major

organ systems. Even then, the decision to stop smoking even at the age of eighty has its own merits.

By the turn of this century, the number of deaths due to smoking related illness will out weigh the deaths produced by all major ailments put together. One in every three deaths in elderly smokers, results from smoking related illness.

Myocardial Infarction, stroke and Insulin resistance in type II diabetes can be prevented to a large extent by total avoidance of smoking. Nicotine replacement therapy and the antidepressant BUPROPION promises successfully treating this deadly addiction.

Excessive consumption of alcohol is never advisable. All latest studies have disproved any protection offered by alcohol, that had been reported in the past.

Exercise should be included as a routine from early childhood. Children should see regularly, their parents exercising so that they will also develop a habit of systematic structured exercise. Physical activity should be continued in old age too. Exercise will even prevent degeneration of neurons, which will promote secretion of ANTIATHEROGENIC CYTOKINES and will prevent the aches and pains and physical disability of old age.

Hypertension and diabetes are the two non-communicable diseases, which had risen to epidemic proportions. Both these illnesses might be diagnosed and treated only after years of its occurrence. Routine clinical exam, repeated at least once in three years should be strictly followed. The newer recommendation for the treatment of High Blood Pressure, advocates management when BP is above 140/90 mm Hg irrespective of the age of the individual.

Aggressive treatment of high systolic BP in people above 60 years of age will bring down strokes by 44% and heart attack by 26%.

Screening for diabetes should be conducted at least once in 3 years in

people above 45 years of age. In otherwise healthy individuals fasting plasma glucose is estimated if there is a close relation with diabetes, if obese BMI is above 27 kg 1m² or if delivered a baby with weight above 9 lb. etc. American Diabetes Association, in the new protocol brought out recently, puts the value of Fasting Plasma glucose at 126 mg% to diagnose diabetes mellitus.

Periodic breast examination and cervical smear testing for early detection of malignancy is a compulsory routine in many developed countries.

Sexual activity is a part of healthy mind and body. Although vaginal dryness is one limiting factor after menopause, many studies have proven that if sexual activity is still continued, this can be delayed. Hormone replacement therapy, under a physician if carried out successfully, will add cheer and colour to the fun filled life of elderly.

Though medical science has progressed and achieved several landmark victories, the exact etiology of ageing still remains obscure. Free radicals liberated as by products of cellular metabolism are supposed to damage the tissues. Anti oxidants like low dose vitamin E, A, C, Zinc, selenium etc might have a role as free radical scavengers.

The WHO is now preparing for a global event on 2 October 1999. It is termed, 'THE GLOBAL EMBRACE', for promoting active ageing. This will be an international event marked by round the clock, round the globe, walk events along the time zones.

Old age is not the time to take rest. Older people do contribute to the society. Old age is not synonymous with disease. Many of the so-called old age diseases are to an extent preventable.

Life in this planet is short and precious to us. Ageing is an inevitable phenomenon. Living longer makes sense if quality of life is maintained. Let us all join hands with WHO to prepare ourselves and the society for an active healthy ageing.

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