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June 2013

THE GOLDEN YEARS

3 FACTS
ABOUT
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LIVE BETTER, LONGER

Enjoy your seniors years to the fullest through essential financial planning, vital healthcare support and maintaining a sense of community.

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NEWS

Reshaping the lives of Canada's baby boomers

**INSPIRING RESEARCH**

LEFT: Engaging in hobbies, like playing the piano, is not only emotionally, but also mentally fulfilling.
PHOTO: ISTOCK

RIGHT: Pat Spadafora, of the Sheridan Elder Research Centre, finds her inspiration through caring for her elderly father.

PHOTO: PAT SPADAFORA

Our increase in life expectancy is considered a major worldwide achievement. But as people live longer and healthier, there's a shared responsibility to accommodate Canada's aging population.

We live in a time where 80 percent of people over the age of 65 live very healthy independent functional lives in their own homes and communities. With 20 percent of seniors suffering from complex health issues, it is imperative that we redesign our healthcare system to provide support to meet their needs. "Prior generations built our society. They sacrificed so future generations could have good lives. We owe them respect and gratitude," states Josie d'Avernas, Vice President, University of Waterloo Research Institute of Aging.

Challenges do exist, but can be fixed

"The whole area of longevity is to be celebrated," says Pat Spadafora, Director, Sheridan Elder Research Centre, Sheridan College, Oakville campus, which is known for helping older adults stay healthy for as long as possible.



Dr. Parminder Raina
Lead Researcher,
Canadian Longitudinal Study
on Aging

"Our belief is that you can age well and healthy and have a good quality of life whether you're living in your own home or a long-term care facility," states Spadafora. The healthcare system has many demands on it from everyone not just older adults.

Family caregivers and the elderly both require growth and opportunity — from healthcare training and more long-term beds, to fundamental services like dance groups to strengthen balance, muscular endurance, flexibility and range of motion as it is a fact that older adults get the least amount of exercise than other age groups.

The brighter side of things

Advanced research is well underway to increase knowledge on the aspects of aging from a biological, social, clinical, and an economic standpoint.

The Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging is the largest of its kind; collecting data from 50,000 Canadian participants between ages 45 and 85. "Aging is a huge accomplishment of our society. It is an opportunity as well as a challenge and we should embrace both," says Dr. Parminder Raina, Lead Researcher, Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging.

Wisdom and experience can be taken from the older generation and they should be the drivers of services and programs. "If you want to know what an older adult needs or wants, ask them," declares Spadafora.

Aging gracefully

Planning ahead

We plan for most things in life — going to school, our work and careers, purchasing a home, having children, vacationing, retiring. However, we often don't think about how we want to age and what would be most important to us at that stage of our life. There are some basic questions to consider:

1. Where do I want to grow old?**2. What are the most important things I enjoy and want to continue to be able to do as I age?****3. Who are my most important supports and what role will they play in my life?****4. What will I do if I need help or if I get seriously ill?**

change is in a crisis. So, once you know your wishes, it's important to share these with family and friends: if they know what's critical to you, you can plan together.

Knowing your options

Knowing your options is important and can sometimes be a challenge. There are many supportive services available to help manage the lifestyle changes that come with getting older. Some are publicly funded, accessible within your community, and some may be available privately at a cost. In Ontario, 14 government funded agencies, called Community Care Access Centres (CCACs), specialize in connecting people to health and community services. Care coordinators employed by CCACs are health professionals who work with you, your family, and often your other health care providers to find what care and services you need to stay safely and independently at home, or, if living at home becomes too difficult, to guide you through the process of understanding long-term care options.

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NEWS

YOUR BRAIN AND GOOD HEALTH

It is estimated that over 500,000 Canadians have Alzheimer's disease or other dementia. Currently there isn't a cure, but preventative methods can keep your brain healthy.

Alzheimer's, a progressive degenerative disease of the brain is the most common form of dementia and usually occurs in older adults typically described as age 65 and up. "The best way to detect it is to go to your family doctor and mention specific signs and symptoms you've noticed," says Julie Wong, Public Education Co-ordinator, Alzheimer Society of Toronto.

Use it or lose it

In order to prevent the onset of Alzheimer's and dementia, it is important to stay mentally stimulated. Try implementing simple lifestyle changes to help preserve your memory and the ability to process information.

"As we age we tend to not stimulate our brain as much and go back to routine and practice," states Wong. Crossword puzzles, Sudoku exercises, physical activity and healthy diet are some of the factors that play a role in delaying or minimizing the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease.



But the most important risk prevention factor is to make sure your head is protected from injury of any sort. For older people, it's about ensuring hallways are clutter free and good shoes are always worn.

Community support

Socialization is encouraged whether you suffer from this disease or not. Participating in community groups and staying connected to the world around you is very beneficial to your well being. It could be as simple as joining a dance group or a club.

In terms of increasing awareness, there are educational workshops provided by the organizations like the Alzheimer Society of Toronto which offer information and education about brain health, understanding dementia, Alzheimer's disease, and keeping the home safe.

"People who have dementia can still have a good quality of life and connect with the world and the people around them," says Wong.

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Do you have questions about dementia?

Contact us for free education, counselling or support.

Alzheimer Society
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