

Basic Concept of Healthy Aging

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Abstract

Population aging is a characteristic of the 21st century, regardless of a nation's level of development. An aging global population results in a burden in medical and social demographic problems. Addressing this problem is the highest priority for the care of the older population worldwide. Healthy aging is an individual lived experience that is influenced by healthy behaviors over the course of a lifetime. This includes a person's ability to: meet their basic needs; learn, grow and make decisions; be mobile; build and maintain relationships, and contribute to society. For the promotion of healthy aging, a healthy lifestyle is important. A healthy lifestyle for older adults includes healthy eating, regular physical activity, staying at a healthy weight, improving mental health, social participation, regular health checkups and health screening, no smoking, and taking steps to prevent falls.

Keywords: Aging, healthy aging, preventing aging, active aging, Decade of healthy aging

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In the 20th century, aging was occurring mainly in developed countries and developing countries were less concerned with this. But, now life expectancy in the world is increasing despite some regional differences. Rapid population aging is a characteristic of the 21st century, regardless of a nation's level of development.¹ However, an increased life expectancy does not always imply improved health and well-being in the later years of older people. Aging often comes with problems affecting wellbeing, such as depression, loneliness, and ill-health.²⁻³ As a result, as people in the world are aging, well-being of older adults in the world is increasingly becoming an important issue.⁴⁻⁵

Aging is a multifaceted process, involving numerous molecular and cellular mechanisms in the context of different organ systems. An important part of aging is a set of functional and structural alterations that weaken the immune system. Old age is not a disease but aging is associated with a decline in the immune system and intrinsic capacity.⁶ An aging population impacts almost every area of government policy and presents

several socioeconomic and health and care challenges. So, people from the multidisciplinary field are working to find out the ways how people in old age can also have good health and quality of life.

At the biological level, aging results from the impact of the accumulation of a wide variety of molecular and cellular damage over time. This leads to a gradual decrease in physical and mental capacity, a growing risk of disease, and ultimately death. With increasing age, older people may suffer from geriatric syndrome like cognitive impairment, depression, falls, musculoskeletal pain, urinary symptoms, dizziness, functional dependence, and others. It will have a substantial impact on morbidity, disability, and healthcare of older people. Older adults are more likely to suffer from chronic medical conditions that increase their risk of developing geriatric syndrome that, in turn, has been shown to be as prevalent as chronic diseases and the co-occurrence of both can have a significant effect on older adults' functional status and their ability to manage their overall health, let alone the rising costs

of care.^{8,9} But, having a healthy lifestyle can help people deal with age-related changes.

An aging global population results in burden in medical and social demographic problems worldwide. Addressing this problem is the highest priority for the care of the aging population worldwide. But, having a healthy lifestyle can help people deal with most of those changes. It may also prevent some health problems and help individuals make the most of their life. Some of the benefits of staying active and healthy as people get older include increasing well-being and participation, recovering from illness more quickly, reducing the risk of getting a chronic disease, and preventing falls.

Every person in every country in the world should have the opportunity to live a long and healthy life. Yet, the environments in which we live can favor health or be harmful to it. Environments are highly influential on our behavior, our exposure to health risks (for example, air pollution or violence), our access to quality health and social care, and the opportunities that aging brings. Healthy aging is about creating the environments and opportunities that enable people to be and do what they value throughout their lives. Everybody can experience healthy aging. Being free of disease or infirmity is not a requirement for healthy aging, as many older adults have one or more health conditions that, when well controlled, have little influence on their well-being.¹⁰ The World Health Organization (WHO) defines healthy aging as the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability to enable well-being in older age.¹⁰ Functional ability is about having the capabilities that enable all people to be and do what they have reason to value. This includes a person's ability to meet their basic needs; learn, grow and make decisions; be mobile; build and maintain relationships, and contribute to society.¹¹

Healthy aging is an individual lived experience that is influenced by healthy behaviors over the course of a lifetime, including good nutrition, physical activity, access to high-quality healthcare, and social engagement. The intent to age well should be fostered early in life. Well-being incorporates physical, mental, and social health and is the birthright of every human being. A common misconception is that a requirement of healthy aging is the absence of disease or infirmity. In reality, many older people experience one or more health conditions that when well-managed, have little impact on their wellbeing.¹²

According to WHO, key principles behind healthy aging are: 1. older people are of intrinsic value to society 2. evidence indicates that health promotion and interventions can extend both length & quality of life 3. it is never too late to promote health, even in very old age 4. tackling health inequalities should be at the core of any healthy aging strategy 5. respect autonomy and personal control – involve older people in the design of healthy aging strategies 6. respect individuality and heterogeneity.¹²

Healthy aging refers to the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security, to enhance the quality of life as people age. "Healthy aging" is often used interchangeably with terms such as "active", "successful", or "productive aging". We prefer the term "healthy aging", because the World Health Organization (WHO) defines "health" as including not only physical and mental health but also social well-being.¹³ Everybody can experience Healthy Aging. Active, healthy aging helps reduce the pressure on health care and social services. Seniors make important contributions to their families, their communities, the economy, and their nation.

According to WHO, four elements of healthy aging are functional abilities (health-related attributes that allow people to do what they have reason to value); intrinsic capacities (all the physical and mental capabilities that an individual can draw on); environments (all the factors in the extrinsic world that form the context of a person's life); and well-being (happiness, security, and fulfillment).¹⁰ Fixed personal characteristics (e.g., gender or ethnicity), social norms (e.g., occupation, education, wealth, or social security), and other factors (e.g., smoking, drinking, deprivation, or air pollution) across our life span can later affect health characteristics such as physiological risk factors, diseases, injuries, and broader geriatric syndromes. The cumulative effects of these health characteristics determine one's intrinsic capacity. Intrinsic capacity and its interaction with the environment determine an individual's functional ability and consequently govern the attainment of well-being¹⁰.

For the promotion of healthy aging, a healthy lifestyle is important, which includes healthy eating, regular physical activity, staying at a healthy weight, improving mental health, social participation, regular health checkups and health screening, no smoking, and taking steps to prevent falls. Even if people have never

done them before, it's never too late to start taking care of their health.^{14,15} Older people who stay healthy, active, and independent can continue to contribute their skills, knowledge, and experience to society.

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