

Growing older is an experience we all share and many of us worry about. As we age, we face many changes and many sources of stress – we are not as strong as we used to be, illness is more of a problem, children move away from home, people we love die, we may become lonely, and eventually we must give up our jobs and retire.

Coping with all these changes is difficult, but it can be done. The keys to coping include your long-term lifestyle, your ability to expect and plan for change, the strength of your relationships with surviving family and friends, and your willingness to stay interested in and involved with life.

It is, therefore, very important to think carefully about what will happen to you as you age and how you are going to deal with the changes that will happen.

DEALING WITH PHYSICAL CHANGES

As you grow older, your body will naturally change. You may tire more easily than you used to. You may become ill more often. You may not see or hear as well as you did when you were younger.

Here are some things you can do to cope with these physical changes:

- Accept reality. Denying these changes will only make life less enjoyable for you and the people around you. Get the things that will help you - eyeglasses or hearing aids for example.
- Keep a positive attitude. Remember that slowing down does not mean you have to come to a complete stop. Chances are you will still be able to do almost all the things you used to; you may just need to take a little more time and learn to pace yourself.

- See your family doctor regularly. He/she can, then, deal with any changes or symptoms that require medical attention.

- Be careful about your medications. As you get older, they may begin to interact differently with other drugs and to affect you differently than before. Make sure your doctor knows about all your medications, even those prescribed by another doctor.

- Take responsibility for your own health. Do not hesitate to ask your doctor questions; some do not offer explanations unless asked.

- Change your eating habits. Adopt a balanced diet with fewer fatty foods, and try not to over-eat.

- Drink less alcohol. Your body will have more difficulty coping with it as you grow older.

DEALING WITH BEREAVEMENT

As you get older, you will likely experience the loss of loved ones more often. It is important to remember the following ways of coping with your grief:

- Do not deny your feelings. Losing someone to death is like being wounded, and you need to heal. If you do not allow yourself to go through the grieving process, you are only storing up problems for a delayed reaction later on.

- Accept the range of emotions you will feel. Tears, anger and guilt are all normal reactions.

- Remember and talk about the deceased person. He/she was an important part of your life. Although your grief will pass, your memories will always stay with you.

- Look to your family and friends for support. They can help you through the grieving period and help you establish a new life afterwards.

- Be supportive of those you know who have suffered a loss. They need the warmth and caring that friendship can bring, just as you will when it happens to you.

DEALING WITH LONELINESS

Everyone needs some time alone, but being alone against your will is very painful. You risk losing your sense of purpose and self-worth, and becoming depressed. As family members and friends die and children become more involved in their own lives, it is important for you to find ways to cope with loneliness. You may want to consider some of the following suggestions:

- Stay active, and look for new social contacts. Most communities have a number of programs which can help replace the support that used to be provided by family and life-long friends. These programs provide older people with the chance to try new activities and make new friends.

- Very young children can brighten up your life. Try to make friends with people of different ages. You may be pleasantly surprised to find how much you have in common with someone 15 or 20 years younger than you.

- Spend time with grandchildren and great-nieces and nephews. Volunteer to help part-time in a local school or day-care centre. Very young children can brighten up your life with their enthusiasm and energy

- Learn to recognize and deal with the signs of depression. Loss of appetite and weight, inability to sleep, loss of energy and motivation, and thoughts of suicide are all signs of depression. Your family doctor can refer you to a mental health professional for treatment.

DEALING WITH RETIREMENT

Your retirement can be a major source of stress because your job is usually a very important part of your life. This stress may be even greater if you have been forced to retire because of your employer's retirement policies. You may lose your sense of identity and feel less worthwhile. You will probably miss the daily contact with friends from work.

However, retirement can be one of the best times of your life, and there are things you can do to meet the challenges facing you, such as:

- Make a list of your abilities and skills. The skills and experience you have gained from a lifetime of work may help you succeed in a small business or do valuable volunteer work for a favourite charity.
- Enrich your life by renewing contacts with neglected family members and old friends. All too often, our work gets in the way of our relationships and those we care about.
- Renew your interest in the hobbies and activities you enjoy. You now have time to play – enjoy!
- If you can afford it, travel. There are probably places you have wanted to see all your life. The early years of your retirement can be the ideal time to become a nomad for a while.

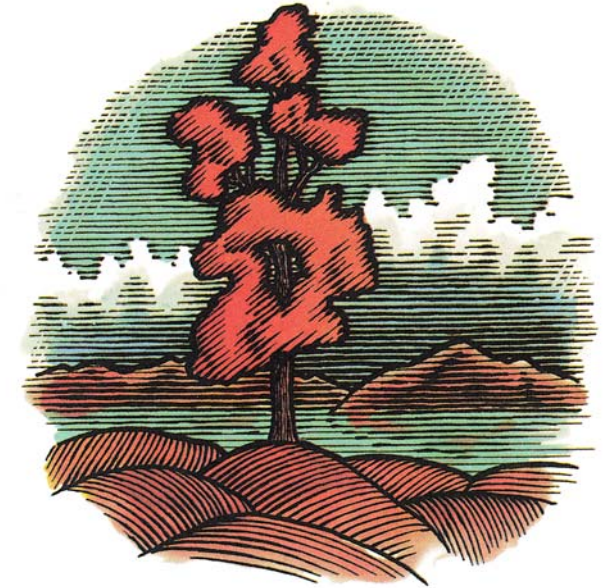
DO YOU NEED MORE INFORMATION?

If you or someone you know is concerned about growing older, check your local library or bookstores for some helpful books that can give you more information. There are also professional counsellors who specialize in the problems of aging. If you need more information about resources in your area, contact a community organization, such as the Canadian Mental Health Association, which can help you find additional support.

The Canadian Mental Health Association is a nation-wide, voluntary organization that promotes the mental health of all and supports the resilience and recovery of people experiencing mental illness. CMHA accomplishes this mission through advocacy, education, research and service.

Visit the CMHA website at www.cmha.ca today.

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MENTALLY HEALTHY PEOPLE IN A HEALTHY SOCIETY



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