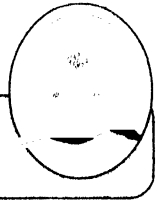


# The Problem of Old Age in India



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I have always noticed a peculiar thing about old people. In old age they do exactly what they tried their best to stop their children from doing when they were young parents! For e.g. eat things not good for health or involve themselves in an activity too strenuous for their heart or just not listen when advised something good or simply be just disobedient and stubborn.

That, I guess is part of this special package called 'Ageing'.

A man's life is divided into five main stages: namely infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age. In each of these stages an individual finds himself in different situations and face different problems. Old age is not without problems. In old age physical strength deteriorates, mental stability diminishes; Money power becomes weak coupled with negligence from the younger generation.

There are 81million older people in India - 11 lakh in Delhi itself. This well lived and experienced group of people in our society have a whole new set of problems to deal with at this stage of their lives; most of them, of course, medical.

Everyone wants to be healthy and vigorous throughout their life. But being healthy in old age is like a boon. Since old age brings with itself many 'health problems, if not taking complete care of ourself when younger, then these diseases becomes hard to cure and manage in old age.

People would expect a headline that shouts "New Drug Prevents Heart Disease in Elderly" to herald a story about something thoroughly laudable.

The headline could be equally correct if it said instead "New Drug Promises Major Increases in Dementia!" Saving lives of children who otherwise faced polio was reasonably understood to be a very good thing. Saving the lives of elderly persons by eliminating one among a group of competing causes of death is more complicated. Eliminating

one illness might well change the nature of the death and delay its timing, but the language of saving lives is misleading.

In India, the elderly have much more to deal with than abroad, where governments maintain special schemes and health insurances for senior citizens. While we can't do much about the neglect by our government, as health personnel we owe much to this wise and experienced class of society who have lived glorious lives and we should not let them fade away into lifelessness.

We need to prepare our patients while they are still middle-aged for the inevitable phase of old-age. Giving them useful health tips on diet and exercise and reminding them to keep a constant check on important parameters such as regular blood tests, cholesterol and blood pressure.

Even these are actually not enough in our so called 'preparation'; because more than anything else we need to be mentally and emotionally ready for the arrival of 'old age'. Before retirement, a thorough, well thought plan must be made as to how exactly you are going to spend your post-retirement life. People need to be warned about possible neglect from the younger generation and given counseling as to how to cope with that. But by the time one reaches old age, one forgets what kind of youngsters they themselves used to be and carry within themselves, several emotional hurts from family, children etc. In India, more than anywhere else, much is expected from the younger generation towards the health care of the elderly; Much to our relief, we still see quite a number of children who are willing to look after their ageing parents. Older people are much more dependent on their young children here than abroad, where the senior citizens lead relatively independent lives. Not surprisingly then, parents tend to feel they are a burden on their young ones, who are in the

process of making a life of their own. They would rather make do than make demands on the children, not realizing that depriving themselves of small things, may save money but make them unhappy human beings who can easily go into depression, a much more costly pay-off.

Coming to the medical aspect, half of the elderly who survive one trip to an intensive-care unit die within a year (Rockwood et al. 1993). By age eighty-five, most people have more than two established diagnoses of conditions that can be expected to worsen and cause death (Wolff, Starfield, and Anderson 2002). A quarter century ago, Tauber (1976) computed the effects of eliminating cancer as a cause of death and found less than a year of prolonged survival on average (and a substantial increase in the likelihood of dying from heart disease). Winning the war against a particular cancer would yield major gains for a few people who now die young, but it would mostly have small effects on older people, since old age is when most people die of cancer. Another illness is, all too often, waiting in the wings.

Here are some useful health tips for old age:

**DRINK ENOUGH WATER:** It cleanses your body machinery and helps your heart in functioning well. Drinking of enough water will keep away chances of kidney stone and urine problem. It will also keep you looking young and active along with a natural glow on your face.

**EXERCISE REGULARLY:** Inclusion of regular exercise in your daily life is the best health tip for old age. Exercising will not only help in promoting brain regeneration but also obviate decline in body parts. Practice any form of exercise depending on what you and your body can manage. Talk to your health care provider on what exercise you should undertake in your old age. Seniors can also use yoga which generates flexibility and balance in their body. Best exercise is talking long, regular morning walks. You not only get exercise but get friends too. I find this morning 2 hrs spent in a nearby garden, provides enough entertainment for the whole day. I always feel happy to see the old

folk getting together, planning picnics, some talks, senior citizen club or some other entertainment with others of their laughing club. Gives them a reason for living happily, when they have something active to do.

**WELL BALANCED DIET:** Plays too important a role in keeping you healthy in old age. Avoid sweets and fried, even though you crave it. Think of your liver. You should add calcium rich diet as it will strengthen your bones. In old age teeth becomes weak and so diet should also be soft cooked so that it intake is easy. Add fruits, vegetables, greens and curds in your daily diet to maintain your health in old age. Proper nutritional food keeps many diseases away and also save you from common problems of aging. Addition of nutrition food can save from problems like obesity, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and osteoporosis as these are generally prevalent nutrition related health problems which occur in old age.

**BE HAPPY AND ENGAGE IN RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES:** During old age, factors like social isolation, low income and depression affect health in old age. Loneliness is a common problem in old age and leads to related problems. During this time, it becomes all the more important for seniors to take on some activity which occupy their time. Take part in social activities and indulge in pursuing your hobbies in spare time. Make friends and make use of their company to keep yourself active and happy.

**BE HAPPY AND VISIT YOUR DOCTOR REGULARLY:** During old age, seniors should take deep care of their health. This includes a regular visit to a health care professional. You should visit and consult your doctor regularly and try to implement all the suggestions and precautions given by your doctor. Health in old age is not that hard to have and maintain. All you need is to follow some simple steps which can be easily included in your daily life without much effort. Most likely you are to know them already but now is the time to get started. Good health is not a struggle, nor is it an extraordinary feat. It is your birth right and you must invest in it.