

Independent Living Skills workshop: Aging Gracefully

Tuesday, May 17th

Guest Speaker: Monique Featherstone – Premier Homecare Services

Monique's business send people into the homes of seniors to help with their activities of daily living, so the aging process is something she is very passionate about.

She emphasizes that the process of aging gracefully is different for everyone! It is effected by what you are capable of doing, and what types of things you value.

Monique mentions that spending time with younger people can be very helpful for getting in touch with your youthful feelings. Spending time playing with little children is refreshing because they don't see age the same way, their energy can be contagious! Spending time with teens and you adults can be refreshing as well, listen to their stories – they are entertaining and may give you a different perspective on the day.

Then, of course, there are the obvious lifestyle areas of nutrition and exercise that effect the aging process. We know these things are important to maintaining health, but do we actually take the time to follow through with healthy eating plans or exercise routines? This comes back to how our values can effect the ability to age gracefully...you must make these things a priority if you are to make effective changes that will positively impact your health.

One tip for healthy eating is to try and do the majority of your shopping in the outside aisles of the grocery store. All the stores are set up similarly, with the most nutritious, natural, whole foods along the outside aisles (eg. milk products, meat, produce etc.) and then the inner aisles are pre-packaged foods with many artificial additives.

“Whole foods” means that there is nothing added, they may be frozen, but there are is no added salt or preservatives, like in canned or boxed foods.

You still need to keep in mind your own specific dietary needs (eg. watching salt, sugar, red meat consumptions etc.)

Carbonation is also to be avoided. The bubble/gas expands your stomach, which will increase your appetite. Diet soda options are also not great – although, they don't contain sugar, they have artificial sweeteners like aspartame that can have negative effects on your health.

If you are craving a sweet drink, herbal tea is a good option. It does still have caffeine in it, which is not great, but it also contains natural sugars and more wholesome fruit ingredients.

One experiment you may want to try is recording what you eat everyday for a whole week. Then, you can look back and see where the problems and difficulties are happening. For example, noticing that you eat certain types of foods when you're stressed, or even just noticing that you eat more processed/packaged snacks than you thought. Then, you can make small changes as a time to help improve your diet.

Exercise is the other important area that takes a lot of practice and commitment. We should be doing 1 hour of physical activity per day. It doesn't necessarily have to be a "work out", but just activities that really get your heart pumping – cardio is the most effective form of exercise for health benefits. The intensity of any exercise must be modified to your own abilities, to prevent overexertion or injury. Swimming is a great option, especially as we age, because it works the whole body at once with almost no strain on the joints.

Mental stimulation is extremely important as well. Something as simple as socializing with others will help to keep your brain youthful. Doing activities you enjoy such as crosswords, reading a book, volunteering with charities, joining groups to play cards or have discussions are all good options to exercise your brain functions.

Another factor to help age more gracefully is to visit your doctor regularly and do whatever you can to follow their plans/suggestions.

ALWAYS consult with your doctor before taking or stopping ANY medications. Stopping medication suddenly has the potential to cause massive health problems. Your doctor may be able to prescribe an alternative medication that may not give you the same negative side effects. If you are struggling with medications, it is a good idea to keep a journal about how you feel, so that you

can show your doctor what you notice about how taking those meds is making you feel. Another good idea is to talk to the pharmacist. They know all of the possible drug interactions that may be causing you to feel bad as a result of medications, and they may also suggest staying away from certain foods that can affect how your medications work. Bringing along a friend or family member to appointments can help you to keep all the information straight and make sure your understanding properly.

Social activity is one part of mental stimulation that is really important in helping you to keep feeling younger longer. Keeping connected with family and friends is easier than ever with the internet! Use every excuse you can to Skype with those far away, it is good for you! Or if you are looking for face-to-face interactions, be sure to use your resources! Check out the community boards at local libraries, churches and community centres. Library staff can help you do computer research to find social groups in your community that you might be interested in joining. At community centres, you can often just walk in and talk to someone to find out what is going on that month.

Overall, having a daily routine, or just getting out to do something helps you to feel better! Avoid boredom, take time to do fun things that interest you! Being involved with activities and being productive in your own life/home gives you feelings of purpose and a sense of belonging that will help you to maintain your positive outlook. Getting older is inevitable, but keeping yourself healthy and active can ease the experience and allow you to age with grace.