

CONCERN[®] Services

We're More Than An EAP . . .

*Our Goal is to **Help People Live Better & Help People Work Better.***

The following information is intended to help you accomplish that goal and remind you that, as your Employee Assistance Program, we are here for you and your family. Visit us on-line at www.trihealth.concernservices.com or call (513) 891-1691 / (800) 642-9794 for no-charge, confidential assistance.

Aging Well

Life expectancy in 1900 was 47. Today it is closer to 76. The fastest growing segment of the population is over 85. In a culture that worships youth, this can be a problem. Getting old is often seen as something to be dreaded during which there will be only sickness, loss of intellectual ability, isolation, loneliness and depression. However, it does not need to be that way. In this article, we look at aging and what you can do to lessen the effects of aging.

Sickness

The fact is that most adults over the age of 65 are remarkably healthy. Only 5.2% of older adults live in nursing homes. As of 1994, 73% of adults 78 to 84 reported no disability conditions. Advances in medical technology and greater understanding about management of chronic illness (e.g. diabetes) reduce the likelihood of significant loss of functioning from chronic illness. While it is true there is a reduction in physical ability as we age, it is becoming much more common these days for grannies to lift weights and ride bicycles rather than just sit in a chair all day.



Mental Ability

There are indeed diseases (e.g. Alzheimer's) that result in loss of mental ability. However, older adults who remain mentally active show minimal, if any, decline in thinking and learning ability. Encourage your parents/grandparents to remain mentally active. Encourage them to learn new things, confront new challenges and read. The speed of learning may be slower, but there is evidence that older adults have superior conceptual ability. Keep the environment in which your parent lives as stimulating and varied as possible. Learning and personal growth should be life long experiences.

Depression and Loneliness

The fact is that clinically diagnosable depression is less prevalent in older than in younger adults. Older adults cope more effectively with stress than younger adults. A study found that the size of social networks remain remarkably stable throughout life. Older adults have the same number of close relationships as younger people. However, some elderly are isolated and lonely. New technology enables many older adults to stay in contact with friends and children via e-mail. Help your parents/grandparents develop a social support network through your local senior community center, church or synagogue.

A Sense of Control

We have learned that a sense of personal control is central to mental health. That applies also to the elderly. They need to have the widest possible range of personal control over their lives. Episodes of illness, in which control is turned over to health care providers and hospitals, can improve the health of the body but at a significant emotional cost. As soon as possible you should encourage your parents/grandparents to return to making decisions for themselves and steering their own lives. Keep your parents/grandparents in maximum control of their lives until it becomes inevitable that others must assume control for safety reasons.

Activity

Keep yourself, your parents and your grandparents as active as their health will permit as long as possible. While you should be aware of limitations due to illness, you should be very skeptical about advice from couch potato doctors and nurses. Your parents or grandparents should continue as many of their preferred activities as long as possible. Maintaining high mental and physical function, healthy eating and exercise habits are the keys to avoiding disease. But just as important is a healthy and active mental lifestyle for staying alert and engaged with life.