

Senior citizens learn to age gracefully

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Widening horizon: Senior citizens trying out an exercise at the 'healthy ageing' programme organised by Brahmakumaris in the city. Photo:M.Srinath

“I am old, so what? But I am very young at heart,” declared a 70-plus Shakunatala walking gingerly up to the dais, with a crutch in tow. Diversifying interests and bearing no grudges testified for her exuberance. While a 79-year-old lady claimed that stress and depression were alien to her despite living alone, a retired but visibly robust Balasubramaniam attributed his fitness to early rising and regular planning.

Grey hair and wrinkled faces belied the youthful enthusiasm and steel resolve of senior citizens at the ‘healthy ageing’ programme organised by Brahmakumaris in the city on Monday. Sharing the secrets of ageing gracefully, they concurred that staying busy was the best antidote to ageing. Incorporating some form of exercise, adhering to a set routine and sharing experiences also made it to the list.

Doling out tips on better physical, mental and emotional health, resource person Mahesh Hemadri, expert in geriatric medicine, said there were no geriatric wards and facilities for treating senior citizens were poor in government hospitals as the government does not invest much in the welfare of senior citizens.

In such a scenario, prevention of fall in persons above 60 was crucial to geriatric health. “At least one in three people fall down once a year and this leads to health complications and recurrent expenses. Most fractures are caused by loss of balance.”

Senior citizens can avoid losing balance by taking precautions while getting into the bus, walking around the house, reaching overhead to fetch things, slipping into trousers, fastening footwear or bathing without appropriate support. Fifteen minutes of sunlight everyday for Vitamin D enrichment and including calcium rich foods and supplements can help keep osteoporosis and bone damage at bay. Obesity, spondylitis, hearing loss, poor eyesight and thyroid imbalance can lead to complications and should be monitored in addition to blood pressure and haemoglobin blood count.

Dr. Mahesh demonstrated a few balancing exercises which could be done with adequate support. Ruminating on an ideal diet for senior citizens, he suggested they include soya, chenna, badam, milk, dates, curd and paneer regularly. 30 grams of til powder could make for a healthy choice, though it should be avoided in winter and rainy season.

Memory loss, another common ailment associated with ageing, should be diagnosed and treated at the manifestation of the first symptoms. Senior citizens can choose to learn music or languages after retirement. Writing two pages everyday and sharing past experiences with children and grandchildren can ensure the mind is rejuvenated. Regular walks, limiting sugar and maida in food and practising meditation can also boost memory power.

Depression too can result in memory loss and maintaining peace at home was vital for mental health, Dr.Mahesh added.