

Healthy aging and attitude fill out life

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In part 1 of this column I wrote about the thoughts many have about death.

For many the concept of one's own death is difficult to accept, especially when we are young. As we age, the reality of death becomes more eminent. Ironically, it is important in ageing that we develop helpful strategies to acknowledge dying so that we may continue to live out our lives with meaning and optimism.

The ideas below are those that arise out of everyday experiences in living. As I feel the significance of ageing closing in on me, I want to make sense out of the process of living and that most personal of all experiences, one's own death. What follows are some thoughts on both topics.

1. Use your talents and strengths to create a better world. You will feel more valued as you contribute to society.

2. Recognize your limitations. Set realistic goals about what you can achieve. Decide which tasks are too taxing for you to succeed in ways that you and others would like.

3. Enjoy every day to the fullest. Each day you are free from pain or worry or calamity is a gift. Whether you are religious or not, be thankful for your life.

4. Adjust interests and activities to match your energy and abilities. If you are tired after tasks like babysitting your grandchildren, don't be surprised or disappointed. It's a normal feeling for grandparents.

5. With ageing, problems with health or finances or relationships may develop. Don't burden others with your problems. When asked, "How are you?" your friends are not asking for long recitals of all your aches and pains.

6. Remain flexible. Don't alienate yourself from family or friends by insisting on doing things your way. Consider new approaches and ideas, and visit new places.

7. Rejoice in past achievements. Let younger people assume responsibilities, knowing they may do tasks differently.

8. Become less demanding of yourself and others. A relaxed approach brings peace

of mind and awareness of the shortness of life.

9. Develop an acceptance of the inevitability of death. Ironically, this realization helps one get more out of living as each day becomes more precious.

10. There is a meaningful kind of immortality in the achievements you have accomplished. They live on in the people whose lives you have touched.

11. Don't hesitate to downsize according to your energy and abilities. Be content with simply writing a letter, visiting a friend, reading a book or taking a daily walk.

12. Forgive others. On balance, friends probably did the best they could. Even if they didn't, hanging onto grudges will destroy your happiness. Forgive yourself for your own mistake as well.. Learn from them, but don't dwell on them.

13. Acceptance of death naturally occurs with diminished ambition and ability. As one becomes less capable there is psychologically, less life to give up. Patients with terminal illnesses often come to a natural and rational conclusion that death is a welcome event.

14. Traditional religion offers the hope of eternal bliss in heaven. But this happy promise is counter-balanced by the ominous threat of eternal damnation. Many people, including myself, who have moved from traditional religion to secular thinking, experience waves of relief as they put promises of heaven or hell behind.

15. Be comforted in the thought that you have lived a good life. If your efforts have helped your family, your work place, your community, or others, the world has become a little better because of you.

16. Rejoice in the thought of your own unique life. It could easily have happened that you were never born. What a wonderful opportunity it has been to have the chance to live. It is not a decision of one's own that results in one's existence.. Life is a gift from parents, or more accurately, from nature. Cherish it each day.

17. There are few aids to healthy ageing that are more important than an optimistic attitude and a sense of humour. Finding humour in the normal frustrations of life can help to keep us from dwelling too much on the discouraging aspects of ageing. Humour may actually lengthen our lives and increase our enjoyment of the relatively brief time we have in this wonderful experience of living. In the words of Mark Twain, "there is no cure for birth or death except to enjoy the interval".