The Plus Side of Aging

Up to age eighty (and often older), most people see aging having as many gains as losses. It is a gentle slope that allows them to live life -- for the most part -- as they wish.

Yes, there are losses that accompany getting older. The body is less efficient and often weaker. Friends move away, and some die. Learning takes longer. On the plus side, launching children into adulthood and beginning retirement allow older adults to reclaim the freedom they put on hold decades ago.

Still, facts must be faced. Aging is challenging. But there are choices, and reactions to the inevitable consequences of aging often predict happiness -- or discontent -- in old age.

When independence is no longer a real option, physical aging generally leads to one of two routes: either resigned dependency or chosen inter-dependency. Emotionally, older adults may focus on their losses -- or on serving others. Socially, this is the time they can disconnect -- or they can grow closer to their families, friends, and faith communities.

Spiritually, older adults may find themselves gravitating either toward despair or toward hope. Many choose hope and see this as the time to explore the spiritual. Unfettered by their former busy lives, they experience a subtle, deepening faith. Stripped of the external obstacles to God, they naturally draw closer to Him. Gratitude for the blessings of their lives and a heightened appreciation for the beauty of the moment lead many aging adults to a profound sense of joy and hope.

Along with the loss, growing old provides a unique opportunity to become . . . and grow in faith. Spiritual good health knows no age limit.

September Is Healthy Aging Month

Prayer: I thank you, loving God, for all the blessings in my life. You have given me so much. I love it all. Amen.

Exercise: The Fountain of Youth

The value of exercise for older adults has been proven time and again in countless research studies. In some cases, what we once thought to be a symptom of aging is turning out to be a symptom of disuse! The benefits of keeping active counter some of the losses that accompany aging:

✦ Exercise stimulates the brain. Getting more oxygen to the brain by exercising 30 minutes for three days each week reduces or delays the onset of Alzheimer’s disease.

✦ Exercise improves your mood. Many seniors suffer from depression. Walking, aerobic exercise, strength training -- all blunt the symptoms of the blues.

✦ Exercise combats chronic diseases. It manages (or prevents) high blood pressure, boosts good cholesterol, lowers triglycerides, and reduces plaque build-up in arteries. Regular physical activity can help you prevent type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, and some cancers.

✦ Exercise promotes a good night’s sleep. Insomnia, another problem many older adults experience, can be reduced or eliminated -- and without drugs.

✦ Exercise is a wonderful way to make/keep/enjoy friends. Whether you pump iron in a park district class, walk around the mall, or improve your balance with tai chi; sharing the experience with a buddy makes it fun. And connecting with others keeps us emotionally limber, too!

Physical exercise can transform your life. And more good news? It’s never too late to start! Talk with your health care provider to determine the best exercise plan for you.

- advocatehealth.com
- aarp.org/health/longevity
- walking.about.com
- nia.nih.gov (National Institute of Aging)