

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF MAINTAINING WELLBEING

Adding Life to Years, not just Years to Life

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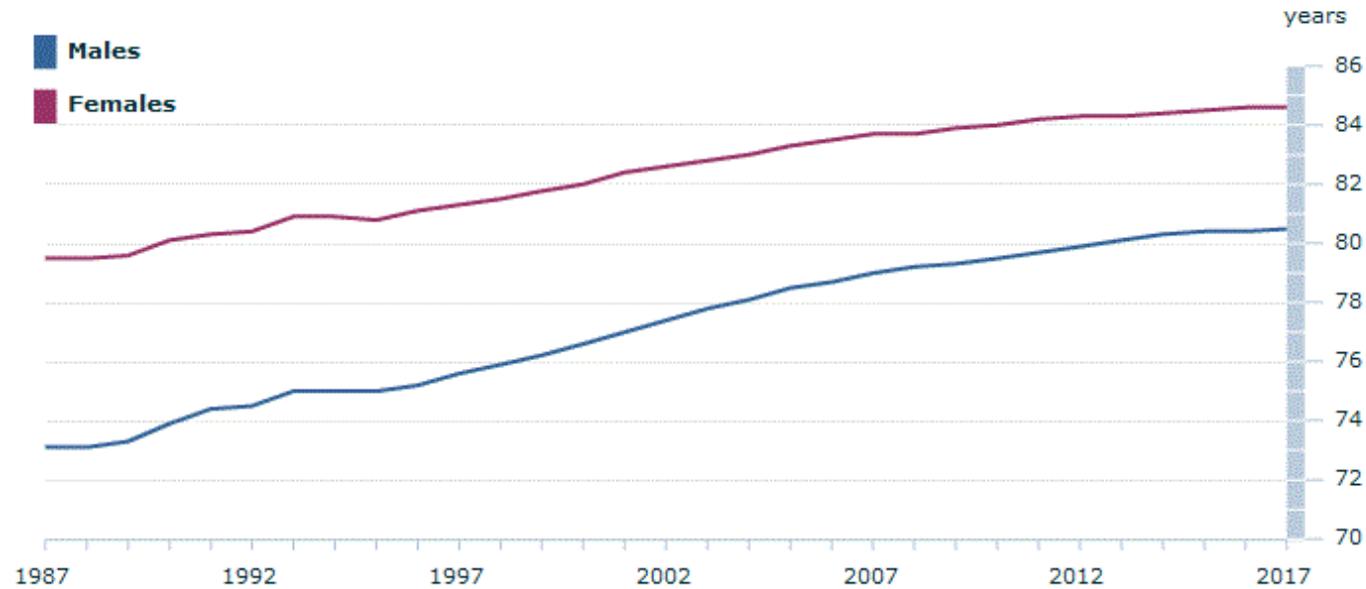
I'd like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land which now comprises Greater Shepparton. I pay my respects to the elders of the Yorta Yorta people, past present and emerging.

Outline of my talk

- Not much about art...
- What do we mean by wellbeing?
- What can we do to maintain wellbeing as we get older?
 - Maintaining a healthy brain
 - Maintaining mental and emotional wellbeing

We are adding years to life...

1.1 LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH(a) - 1987 TO 2015-2017



Save Chart Image

Australian Bureau of Statistics

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And there are many ways of adding life to years...



Some prevalent ideas about human development (1): life is a cycle



Some prevalent ideas about human development (2): life is maturation and then decline



The Life and Ages of Woman. The stages of life from the cradle to the grave. Kelloggs and Comstock, NY and Hartford CN. Circa 1848.



UK road sign indicating that older people may be crossing the road ahead.

Source: <http://www.highwaycode.gov.uk/signs05.htm>

**WHAT DO WE
MEAN BY
WELLBEING?**

The Best Anti-Aging Products We Swear By...



<https://www.townandcountrymag.com/style/beauty-products/g624/top-25-anti-aging-products/>

For centuries people have reverted to obscure beauty rituals claiming to be the source of the fountain of youth— Cleopatra was even known to bathe in donkey milk. *But to age gracefully there isn't just one secret, it takes a collection of products* that will restore, protect, and regenerate your skin. To help you on *your quest of turning back time*, we've rounded up the best anti-aging products to introduce to your routine. From natural beauty wonders to tried-and-true favorite masks, oils, peels, treatments and moisturizers, *these wrinkle-reducing and glow-inducing workhorses turn back the sands of time.*

Some definitions of well-being...

- “healthy, contented or prosperous” (OED)
- “Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.” (WHO)
- Three components of “subjective well-being” (Diener)
 1. Satisfaction with life
 2. Experiencing positive feelings
 3. Not experiencing too many negative feelings

What is “Successful Ageing” ?

- Model developed by Rowe and Kahn (1987) has three components:
 - low probability of disease and disease-related disability
 - high cognitive and physical functional capacity
 - active engagement with life through inter-personal activity and productive activity - including maintenance of autonomy
- “Another, perhaps better way of defining successful aging does not require a social or individual value judgement concerning the behavior of older people. This consists of finding out about how older people feel about their present and past. *If they are happy and satisfied with their lives, they are said to be ageing successfully*” (Havighurst)

Successful Aging -Development of an Idea

- Criticized for implication of “failure”
- Early on question of “Whose definition?”
- Self-rated successful aging (Strawbridge et al., 2002) gives very different results
 - 867 people rated themselves - 50.3% “successful”
 - 18.8 if classified by Rowe & Kahn’s criteria
 - 42.7% with 1 chronic condition rated themselves as aging successfully.

Older peoples' perspectives

- Qualitative interviews with 22 adults (60-96), mainly Caucasian women
 - Two primary themes
 - *Self acceptance + realistic self-appraisal*
 - "...accepting what you are at this time. Not dwelling on what you could have been...or things you want to do, but are no longer capable of"
 - *Engagement + self growth/ giving to others/positive attitude*
 - "You cannot always do the things you did do, but there are other things you can do and look for them..."
- (Reichstadt et al. Am J Geriatr Psychiatry 2010)

The importance of being able to do the things you value

- A “capability” approach
- Focuses on what people *want to be able to do*
- Acknowledges the reality of age-related changes
- Study of 145 people in New Zealand
- *Physical comfort*
- *Security* – includes physical safety, economic resources and healthcare
- *Contribution* – not necessarily “productive”
- *Social integration*
- *Enjoyment*
- *Autonomy*



Healthy Ageing: a Capability Approach to Inclusive Policy and Practice (2019). Stephens and Breheny, London, Routledge.

Which capabilities do you value?

Turn to the person next to you and take a few moments to think about which capabilities you value

Well-being...second time around

- Being healthy
 - Physical health
 - Cognitive/ brain health
- Being independent/able to make decisions
- Being contented
 - Having some positive feelings
 - Self acceptance + realistic self-appraisal
- Being connected to people and activities that you value
 - Making a contribution – not necessarily “productive”
 - Sense of purpose

PERMA Model

Positive emotions

Engagement

Relationships

Meaning

Accomplishments

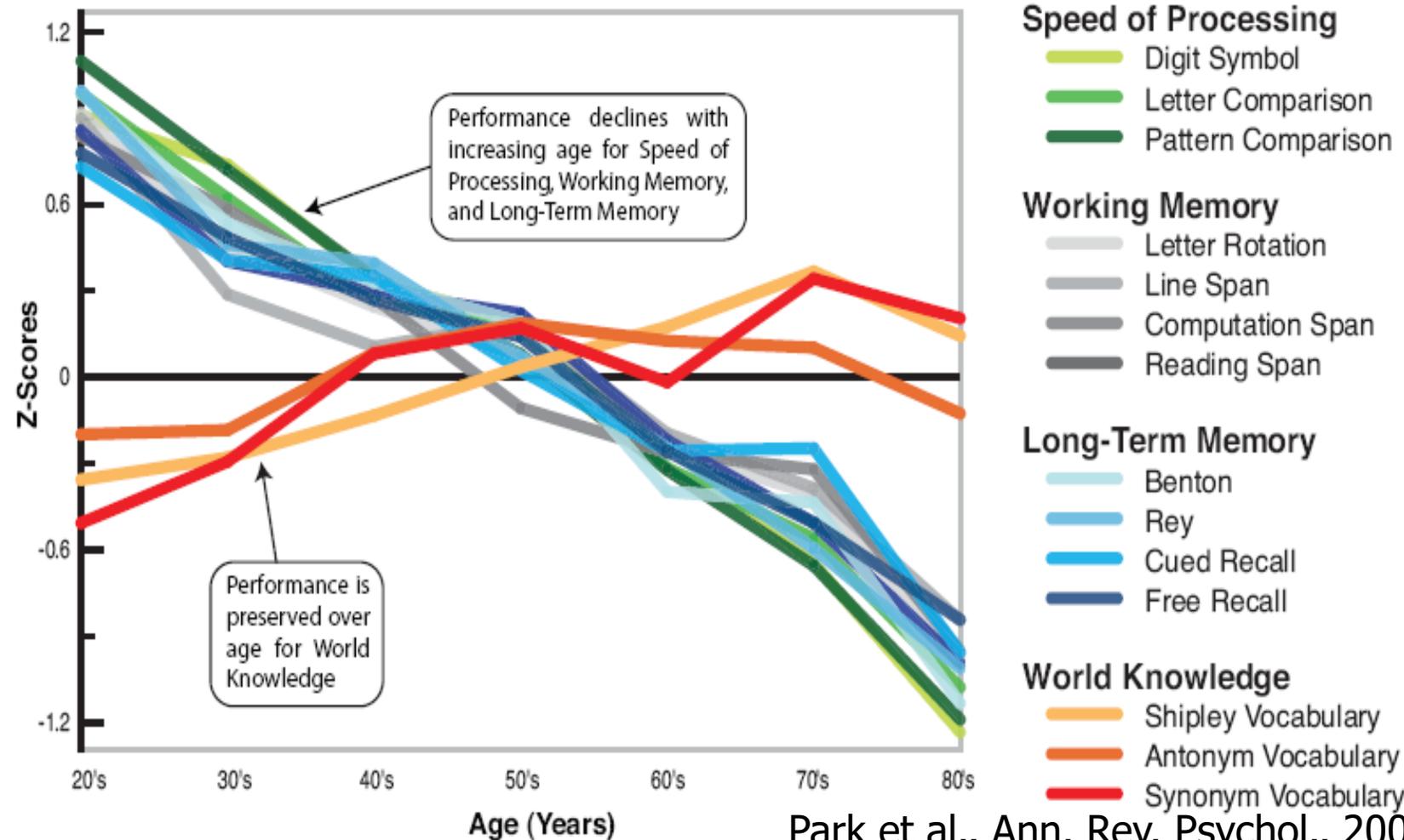
(Martin Seligman)

**THE GOOD
NEWS ABOUT
GETTING
OLDER**

1. Most older people report high levels of wellbeing

- Two-thirds (65%) of people aged 85 and over rated their health as 'good', 'very good' or 'excellent' in 2014-15.
- “The paradox of well-being in old age”: most older adults are satisfied with their lives
- Only 9.0% of people aged 85 and over reported a 'high' or 'very high' level of psychological distress, the lowest rate in any age group (ABS 2015b).
- *I.e. it is not “normal” to be depressed just because you are old*

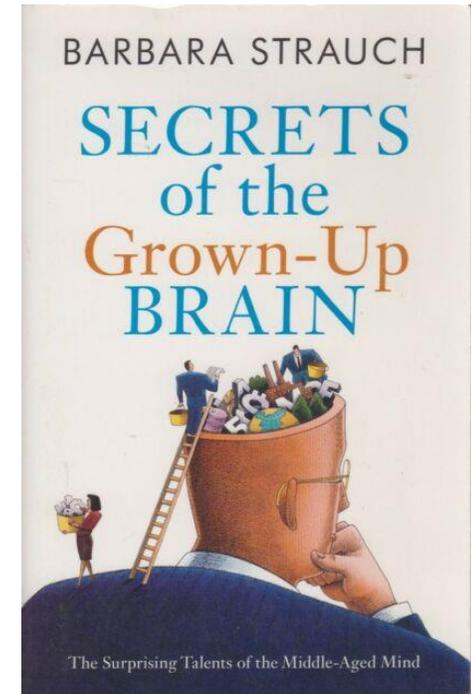
2. We hold on to the things we know



Park et al., Ann. Rev. Psychol., 2009; 60:173-96

3. Our thinking – some things get better

- The brain becomes more densely wired
- Capacity for complex thought can continue to develop
 - We learn to see different sides of a story – “shades of grey”
- Many people worry about their memory at midlife and beyond
 - But it’s not usually due to disease processes
 - Much forgetfulness is because we are distracted



4. We might even get “wise”

- Monika Ardelt (2003) identified three dimensions of wisdom:
 - Looking for the truth and not seeing everything in black and white
 - Ability and willingness to look at different perspectives
 - Capacity for sympathy and compassion
- Up to the age of 80, older adults out-performed younger adults
- Nominated “wise people” outperformed clinical psychologists
 - (Baltes & Smith 1990)

5. We learn about what really matters

- As we get older we shift in our priorities
 - Fewer but deeper relationships
 - A focus on less material aspects of existence
 - Can be associated with religious or spiritual practices
 - And with spiritual themes such as integrity, humanistic concern, changing relationships with others and concern for younger generations, relationship with a transcendent being or power, and coming to terms with death. (Dalby, 2007)
- Not everyone develops this transcendent and perhaps rather lofty perspective
- Probably only possible for those for whom basic needs for security etc. are met

**HOW CAN WE
MAINTAIN
POSITIVE
HEALTH AND
CAPABILITIES IN
LATER LIFE ?**

Let's start with the brain...



What is dementia?

- Dementia is a syndrome characterised by
 - Acquired decline in multiple higher mental functions (intellect, memory and personality) occurring in an alert patient which is usually progressive and irreversible
- It is an age-related disorder whose prevalence doubles every five years between age 60 and 90
- There are more than 400,000 people in Australia with dementia
- High prevalence in indigenous Australians
- The commonest cause of dementia is Alzheimer's disease

Risk factors for Alzheimer's Disease

- *Some risk factors are unmodifiable* – age, family history, genetic vulnerability, being female...
- But potentially modifiable include
 - Avoiding head injury
 - “Vascular” risk factors - especially high blood pressure
- Consistent evidence for a wide range of risk factors
 - Diabetes
 - Hypertension
 - Midlife obesity
 - Depression
 - Physical inactivity
 - Smoking
 - Low educational level

Building up “brain resilience”

- You can't completely control whether you will develop dementia – BUT you can
- Build up your “brain resilience”
 - Which may prevent the disease from causing impairment or delay onset
 1. Physical activity
 2. Physical health: don't smoke, manage blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes
 3. Mental stimulation
 4. Diet and no more than moderate alcohol use
 5. Social connections
 6. Hearing and sleep

Taken from WHO Guidelines for Risk reduction of cognitive decline and dementia



Physical activity

- Increasing PA can reduce the risk of dementia - but may not improve everyday memory in healthy people
- How does it work?
 - By reducing or delay the development of potentially modifiable risk factors for cognitive decline, such as *obesity, diabetes, and hypertension*
- PA boosts cardiovascular fitness, which in turn increases blood flow to the brain
- *"Anything that is good for the heart is good for the brain"*
- Exercise can also increase the proteins in the brain that help brain cells to grow
- It also improves general fitness and mood
- PA will work best in combination with other healthy behaviours, including diet
- *"Short-term interventions begun after decades of high-risk behavior likely are insufficient to reduce dementia incidence"*

Mental stimulation (1)

- Can come from many types of activity
 - Reading, puzzles
 - Learning a new skill or language
 - Going on visits to museums, plays, concerts, activities with grandchildren
 - Art, craft, singing, playing an instrument...
- “Be open to being open”
- The challenge of learning something new simulates the growth of connections between brain cells
- Should be something you enjoy!
 - Makes it easier to motivate yourself
 - Enjoyment helps buffer stress - and stress affects our thinking

Mental stimulation (2)

- “Brain training” programmes
 - May help to learn the specific skills in that programme
 - But may not generalise to everyday memory
 - May suit some people and increase confidence
 - And if your confidence is boosted you will be less anxious about your memory
- On-line programmes don't have the benefit of being in a group

The value of learning

- "...when members are asked what they gain from involvement in UTA activities, the first thing that comes to their mind is not usually related to learning but the associated social outcomes, such as making new friends who share their interests and finding a support group. (Formosa, 2009, p. 178)
 - Quoted in Merriam & Key, *Adult Education Quarterly* 2014, Vol. 64(2) 128–144.

Social engagement (1)

- Because we are “social animals”, social engagement thought to be a good thing
- It can provide
 - Instrumental and emotional support
 - Opportunities to both give and receive
 - Opportunities to engage across the generations
 - Fun, enjoyment, sense of emotional well-being
 - Sense of belonging and being connected
 - Meaningfulness/ Purposefulness

Social engagement (2)

- Systematic review of longitudinal studies (Kuiper et al. *Ageing Research*, 2015)
 - Found a relationship between incidence of dementia and
 - Size of network
 - Social participation
 - Frequency of social contact and
 - Loneliness
- How does this work?
 - “Lose it or use it” theory – being in a stimulating environment stimulates brain
 - Buffer to stress theory – the importance of positive emotions
 - Social networks motivate and support health behaviours

The “Fab Five”

“There’s no pretentiousness, there’s no baggage – we are who we are”

“We met by circumstance and we talk about anything and everything. We solve the world’s problems over a cup of coffee every Friday, but authorities just don’t listen to us.”

“You get a bit of exercise, meet some nice people, have a bit of a chat and then you go to work...”



“And then I got old, my bones started to creak, back ached, and I was having knee problems so I thought I better take up swimming.”

Diet (1)

- No single food or food component has been shown to prevent mental decline
 - But vitamins and some antioxidants found in cumin, berries, dark chocolate, green tea etc. do have an anti-inflammatory benefit
- Light to moderate consumption of alcohol may be protective
- It is likely the *pattern of your diet overall* that can be beneficial
- The “Mediterranean” diet is a key candidate
 - High in vegetables and fruit
 - Relatively low in meat, with protein coming from plant sources
 - Relatively low in sugar, snacks and pastries

Diet (2)

- A large body of evidence and recent clinical trials have linked higher adherence to a Mediterranean-style diet (MeDi) to a lower risk of mental decline and dementia (Berti et al., *Neurology*, 2018)
- Prospective study of 30-60 year olds (N =70) who were high or low scorers on measure of Mediterranean diet
 - After 2 years those who scored high on MeDi had fewer biomarkers of Alzheimer's disease, such as amyloid deposition (the protein thought to be part of the pathophysiology of AD), and hypometabolism
- Mechanisms may include regulation of insulin and cardiovascular benefits of a predominantly plant-based diet
 - And weight control

Sleep, hearing... and smoking

- **Smoking** – just don't!
- **Hearing loss** has been linked to dementia - perhaps because it
 - leads to communication difficulties and isolation
 - increases the load on the brain, diverting resources to auditory processing at the expense of other thinking processes such as working memory (Thomson et al., 2017)
 - Or hearing and cognitive decline share a common neurological process
- **Sleep** is important for consolidating new memories
 - Our ability to remember and work things out is reduced if we are tired
 - Sleep apnoea reduces oxygen flow to the brain and increases risk of dementia
 - Insomnia increases risk of Alzheimer's disease – but not other types of dementia (Shi et al., 2018)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREVENTION

- Eat a variety of foods, including at least 5 servings of fruit and vegetables, each day. Eating fish as a regular part of one's diet may help to preserve memory as a person ages.
- Do not smoke.
- Exercise daily, with appropriate medical guidance.
- Regular mental activity may help preserve cognitive functioning.
- Social contacts with family and friends may enhance preservation of cognitive functions.
- **Antioxidants** (found naturally in fruits and vegetables) are thought to be beneficial, although the role of antioxidant supplements (vitamins and minerals) is controversial.
- Manage chronic illnesses, including depression, diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol.



Prevention of dementia – in summary



MAINTAINING MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

What is depression?

- Everybody has ups and downs but depression is a serious condition
 - Low mood that you can't shake off
 - Losing interest and enjoyment in things you used to enjoy
 - Changes in sleep and appetite
 - Feeling that life isn't worthwhile
- It is not a "normal" or "understandable" part of getting older
- It is treatable and is also a risk factor for getting dementia

How can you prevent depression?

- Everything we spoke about in regard to the brain is relevant here too
 - Maintain physical health and manage health conditions as well as possible, especially those that limit activity or are painful
 - Makes sure blood pressure is checked – some types of depression in later life are linked to high blood pressure and mini-strokes
 - Regular physical activity
 - Engage with people and activities you enjoy
 - Mental stimulation
 - Maintain your sense of purpose
 - Have things to look forward to
 - If you are a carer try to get as much support as you can so you can look after yourself

The power of attitudes

- Significant influence of positive attitudes on a range of outcomes, including:
 - Cognitive performance (Levy, 2003)
 - Engagement in more preventive health behaviours (Levy & Myers, 2004)
 - Longevity (Levy, Kunle & Kasl, 2002)
 - Lower levels of depression (Bryant et al., 2012)
 - Internalised ageist attitudes may reduce involvement in activities that promote health
- "Retirement is just a state of mind"*

Attitudes to ageing

“P.S. I go horse riding and bike riding. I have more freedom than I had bringing up 4 children. I am 69 and enjoying every minute of it.” (Female)

“Why not ask...what exercise people do?...For starters I ride a... bike for 200-250kms per week and play tennis once a week at least”. (Male, 70)

Sometimes it isn't possible to stay well...

- Our genes play an important part in how we age
- Sometimes people “do everything right” and still develop heart disease or Alzheimer’s disease, are disabled by an accident, or have lived with a long-term disability
- It’s important not to blame yourself or other people if that happens
- All the talk about ageing “successfully” might make it seem that declines in health are a “failure”
- Everyone will have some declines as they age - accepting these is the art of ageing gracefully

But we can learn from people who age exceptionally well...

- Studies in so-called “blue zones” show common features of these areas and that centenarians have
 1. Regular physical activity
 2. Plant-rich diets with plenty of legumes
 3. Positive psychological traits such as optimism and resilience
 4. Sense of purpose
 5. Family, social and spiritual engagement



AGEING DISGRACEFULLY

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Aging gracefully is an art.
Aging disgracefully is a complete blast!



Key messages



It's never too late to increase your healthy behaviours. These include:

Be physically active

Have check-ups

Consider your diet

Engage in meaningful activities and relationships



Anything that is good for the heart is good for the brain



Try
combining
activities



Adopt positive but realistic attitudes:

Be kind to yourself

Be flexible – adapt to age-related changes rather than be resentful of them

Stay open to new experiences

REMEMBER: MY TREAT NOW

- **M**ake sure you look after your physical health – have regular check-ups, especially your heart and hearing - and get help to quit smoking if you need to
- **Y**ou should talk to your GP if you are feeling down or stressed and can't shake those feelings off. Being down is not "a normal part of ageing".
- **T**ry to get a regular amount of exercise – even if it's gentle
- **R**emember to do some things that are mentally stimulating and keep you learning
- **E**at plenty of fruit and vegetables; not too much alcohol
- **T**ry to do some things that are meaningful and enjoyable
- **N**ear and far, look after your friendships and family relationships as much as possible
- **O**ptimistic but realistic ways of thinking help you to be adaptable
- **W**ellbeing comes from looking after your physical, emotional and brain health – they are all connected!

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*"I would embrace the aging process
if I could lift my arms."*

Questions or comments?

Please feel free to contact me:

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