

The Spirituality of Aging

These are some of the characteristics that many authors agree determine the quality of our lives as we age.

A. “Love expressed as gratitude”
many of us are grateful for

- family and grandchildren,
- friends and neighbours,
- good health, free time,
- wearing what they want,
- the chance to travel,
- giving back to the community



Try this “thank you prayer.” Repeat the words “I am grateful for...” silently to yourself and watch what comes up. You’ll be amazed how many images of gratitude come to mind.

B. “Love expressed as Generosity” is the basis of the Golden Rule, taught by every religion.



- The desire to give back naturally increases as we age
- Giving is part of our role as community elders
- Giving was so much part of Jesus ministry.

Imagine one of Jesus’ giving gestures, e.g. the feeding of the five thousand, and picture the inner experience of the crowd.

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Reframing. Aging includes losses, physical difficulties and sorrows. What makes all the difference is our attitude to them.

- Suffering a bad knee means we can’t run any more – so we can take up swimming.
- If we lost money to Hanover - we can cherish what we still have.
- If we have gone through chemotherapy – imagine what its like when all the tumours have shrunk?



Living in this moment, focus on the positive aspects of the present and breathe in the joy of living in this moment.

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How was that?



D. Flexibility. Things do change as we age, and some of those changes are hard to cope with. But do not brood over the past, Joan Chittister counsels, or we can become rigid and stuck in our ways.

Regret sits heavy on our spirits and is nothing more than a temptation to despair; “I should have...” - “I should have changed jobs...” - “I should have spent more time with ...”

Set backs in my life

Opportunities it presented

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Think of the “extraordinary elderly” who have inspired you and who have beaten the odds and enjoy their old age to the very end.

The “extraordinary elderly”

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E. **Curiosity** is an important attitude to cultivate as we age; reach out to others beyond old familiar routines. Curiosity keeps us young and we need to cherish it. Mental activity grows new brain cells, emotional engagement lifts the spirit.



These are the mental or emotional experiences I would like to try out

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And this is how I would blossom

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The Spirituality of Aging and Alzheimer's Disease

Research is showing that by leading a “**brain-healthy lifestyle**” we can significantly reduce the risk of Alzheimer's and other dementias. A “brain-healthy lifestyle” is created from a combination of healthy habits, **including eating right, exercising, and quality sleep, staying mentally and socially active, and keeping stress in check.**

Many studies of healthy lifestyle habits - including diet, physical activity and cognitive engagement are providing new insights into the prevention of cognitive decline and Alzheimer's disease. **A leading researcher in this area, Dr Small* says "It's never too early and never too late to start protecting your brain. Prevention is the best way to protect our brains.** In fact, if we take physical exercise, some of the greatest benefits of this are enjoyed by seniors, not just middle-agers.”

6 pillars of Alzheimer's prevention Alzheimer's is a complex disease with multiple risk factors. Some factors, like age and genetics, are outside your control. But many others are within your sphere of influence. And these factors can be quite powerful when it comes to your brain health.



The six pillars of a brain-healthy, Alzheimer's prevention lifestyle are:

1. Regular exercise
2. Healthy diet
3. Mental stimulation
4. Quality sleep
5. Stress management
6. An active social life

The more you strengthen each of the six pillars in your daily life, the healthier and hardier your brain will be. **When you lead a brain-healthy lifestyle, your brain will stay working stronger... longer.**

**The Alzheimer's Prevention Programme*

1. Regular exercise -build muscle to pump up your brain - regular physical exercise can reduce your risk of developing Alzheimer's disease by up to 50 percent. Research suggests that exercise protects against Alzheimer's by stimulating the brain's ability to maintain old connections as well as make new ones.

Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise each week.

- a combination of cardio exercise and strength training,
- anything that gets your heart rate up, for beginners include walking and swimming; cleaning and gardening can count as exercise as long as they get you up and moving.

2: Healthy diet - Eating habits that reduce inflammation and promote normal energy production are brain-healthy. In Alzheimer's disease, inflammation and insulin resistance injure neurons and inhibit communication between brain cells Alzheimer's is sometimes described as "diabetes of the brain".

- **Enjoy a Mediterranean diet** - reduces the risk of cognitive impairment and Alzheimer's disease. That means plenty of vegetables, beans, whole grains, fish, and olive oil—and limited dairy and meat.
- **Eat to protect glial cells.** Researchers believe that glial cells may help remove debris and toxins from the brain, that can contribute to Alzheimer's disease. Foods that may protect glial cells include ginger, green tea, fatty fish, soy products, and blueberries.
- **Avoid trans fats and saturated fats.** To reduce Alzheimer's risk, focus on healthy fats - Omega 3 fats - salmon, tuna, trout, mackerel, and sardines.

3: Mental stimulation - if we continue learning new things and challenge our brains we are less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Stay mentally active; in essence, you need to "use it or lose it." Cross-training with these brain-boosting activities will help keep you mentally sharp:

- **Learn something new.** Study a foreign language or sign language, practice a musical instrument, read the newspaper or a good book,
- **Enjoy strategy games, puzzles, and crosswords.** Brain teasers and strategy games provide a great mental workout.
- **Practice the 5 W's.** Keep a "Who, What, Where, When, and Why" list of your daily experiences.
- **Follow the road less travelled.** Take a new route, eat with your non-dominant hand, rearrange your computer file system. Vary your habits regularly to create new brain pathways.

4: Quality sleep - disrupted sleep isn't just a symptom of Alzheimer's, but a possible risk factor - poor sleep contribute to higher levels of beta-amyloid, a sticky brain-clogging protein that in turn further interferes with sleep that increases risk of Alzheimer's. The vast majority of adults need at least 8 hours of sleep per night. Any less, and productivity and creativity suffers.

Tips to improve the quality of your sleep.

- **Establish a regular sleep schedule.** Your brain's clock responds to regularity.
- **Be smart about day napping** it can make insomnia worse.
- **Set the mood.** Reserve your bed for sleep and sex.
- **Create a relaxing bedtime ritual;** with a hot bath, light stretches or listening to music the brain gets ready for deep restorative sleep.
- **Quiet your inner chatter.** stress, anxiety may keep you awake, get out of bed, try reading, journaling or relaxing in another room for twenty minutes, then return to bed and hop back.

5: Stress management. Chronic stress takes a heavy toll on the brain; leads to shrinkage in the hippocampus a key memory area and increasing your risk of Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

- **Breathe deep** abdominal breathing is powerful, simple, and free! Stress alters your breathing rate and impacts brain oxygen levels.
- **Schedule daily relaxation activities.** Keeping stress under control by regular relaxation - a walk in the park, yoga, or a soothing bath.
- **Nourish inner peace;** spirituality is associated with better brain health. Regular meditation, prayer, reflection, and religious practice may immunize you against the damaging effects of stress.
- **Make fun a priority.** All work and no play is not good for your stress levels or your brain. Make time for leisure activities that bring joy.
Keep your sense of humour. The act of laughing helps your body fight stress; laugh at yourself and have fun.

6: Social engagement. Research shows that staying socially engaged may protect against Alzheimer's disease and dementia in later life so make developing and maintaining a strong network of friends a priority.

Volunteer and care for others

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| • Join a club or social group | • Make a weekly date with friends |
| • Visit your local community centre or senior centre | • Take group classes (such as at the gym or a community college) |
| • Get to know your neighbours | |
| • Join the CAB | |