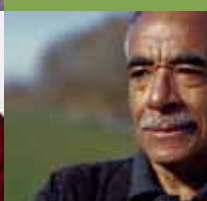




to seniors
seniors





"I can't get out much but I stay involved in my community by writing letters to the editor, and to my MLA."

{ STRATEGIES FOR CONNECTING }

Change, welcome and unwelcome, happens throughout life. Many seniors find that connections to others and to their communities is an important way to buffer the negative effects of some changes.

Know and Use Your Community Resources.

These include seniors' centres, religious and cultural groups and service groups.

"I forced myself out to the seniors' lunches even though I felt miserable – it took time but now I look forward to going."

"I joined the University Women's Alumni Association – it has given me a lot of intellectual stimulation."

Contribute to Your Community.

"I deliver meals on wheels."

"Getting around is tough in the winter, so I started a video club in our apartment block."

Develop Relationships with People of All Ages.

"I take muffins into the local day-care."

"Our Church has a Secret Buddy project that connects seniors to young people – it's fun and a chance to connect with teens."

"I tutor foreign students in English."

Learn New Skills.

"I took up line dancing – it's been a fun way to meet new people."

"I'm taking French at the local college."

Use Technology to Connect.

"I realized not hearing was cutting me off from my social life. It was hard to adjust to a hearing aid but I'm glad I persevered!"

"As my vision worsened I went from big print books to audio books."

"I swallowed my pride and got an electric scooter – it gave me back my independence."

"Email connects me to people all over the world."

Keep Up With What's Going On In The World.

"The chat rooms on the computer are a good way to connect with people who share your interests, without leaving home!"

"Our local seniors centre has a weekly discussion group where we talk about what's going on locally and around the world."

Consider Pets as Companions.

"My cat is a great companion. and gives me the satisfaction of being needed."

"I walk dogs for the SPCA and not only get exercise, I've met new people."

Share Feelings.

"It was very helpful to be able to talk to someone who didn't judge me."

"My daughter and I saw a social worker who helped us to talk about our feelings instead of just fighting."

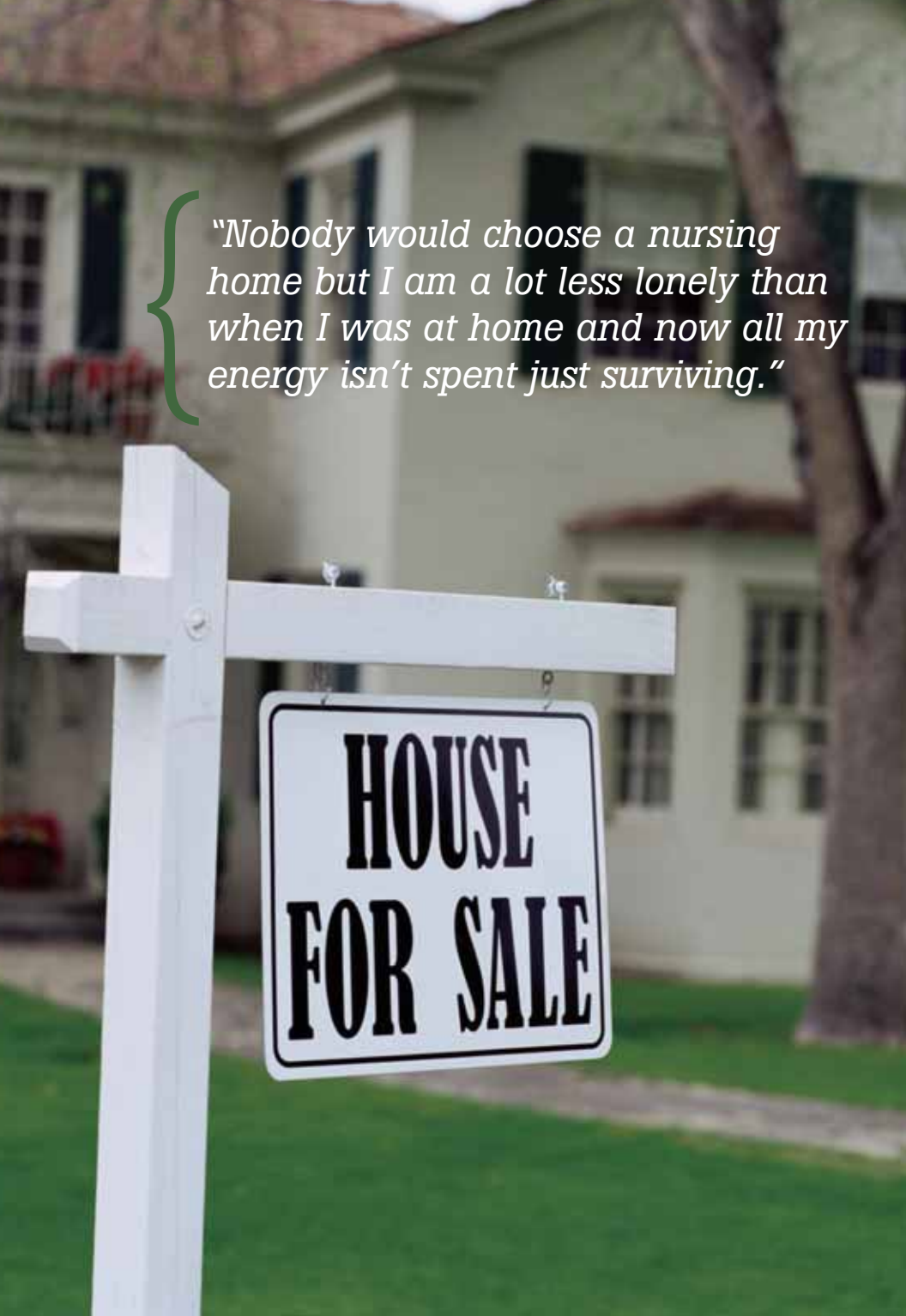
"I had a bad time accepting the changes in myself – it helped to talk to others who had also had the surgery."

"I told my Doctor how depressed I was – he connected me to a group for parents who had lost a child"

"I was so lonely after Jack died – it helped to join the Widows Group – it's very social and took me out of myself."

"I write poetry for the seniors' paper. It's good for me and other people tell me that they like what I say."





"Nobody would choose a nursing home but I am a lot less lonely than when I was at home and now all my energy isn't spent just surviving."

{ STRATEGIES FOR PLANNING CHANGE }

Change, welcome and unwelcome, happens throughout life – the challenge is to adapt

Although we deal with change all through our lives, there are some changes more likely to occur in later adulthood. Some seniors can expect to experience retirement, widowhood, grandparenthood, changes in health, caregiving, relocation or disability.

Retirement

Although there is a tendency to think about retirement mostly in terms of financial planning, seniors identified other issues to think about as well.

"I saw so many guys up and die after the first year of retirement, likely from boredom! I started getting more involved in my church and joined a dart club before I retired to smooth out the transition."

"Joe and I found it was tough learning how to spend so much time together after retirement – we got some counselling and that helped us come together again."

Widowhood

Widowhood will be experienced by one partner for sure, but most seniors still experience it as a shock.

"We're teaching each other how to do each others jobs – I'm learning to cook and she's organizing the household and car repairs."

"My husband and I talked a lot about what to do if we were the one left behind – when the time came I didn't have to worry about whether or not to move, because I already had a plan."

"We got legal and financial advice and we talked about end of life care and funerals – once everything was in order we got on with living, knowing we were each taken care of."

Health Changes

The majority of older adults describe their health as good and very good, but as one gentleman said, "At my age it is like having one foot on a banana skin".

"When I hit 60 I began to concentrate on staying healthy – I took up walking and ate better – now I'm 82 and going strong!"

"I meditate and do Tai Chi to keep my blood pressure down."

"I check on the web for up to date nutritional information."

"My Pharmacist makes sure I know everything I need to about new medication."

Relocation

Most seniors want to remain in their own home as long as possible, and many do. Circumstances sometimes mean making compromises to remain at home, or that there is no choice but to move.

"A friend told me about boarding foreign students and it opened up a new world."

"I planned this move long ago – I knew I wouldn't be able to stay on the farm alone."

"Having Home Support made it possible to stay home – for me, the trade off in privacy was worth it."



{ STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH CHANGE }

Change happens throughout life – the challenge is to adapt.

Most older adults have decades of experience in coping with change at earlier stages in life, and know others who have had to cope with difficult changes.

The knowledge gained from past experiences can point the way for dealing with unexpected challenges that may occur in late adulthood.

Drawing on Experience

Observe or talk to others about how they cope with the difficult things that have happened to them. Are there approaches you can use?

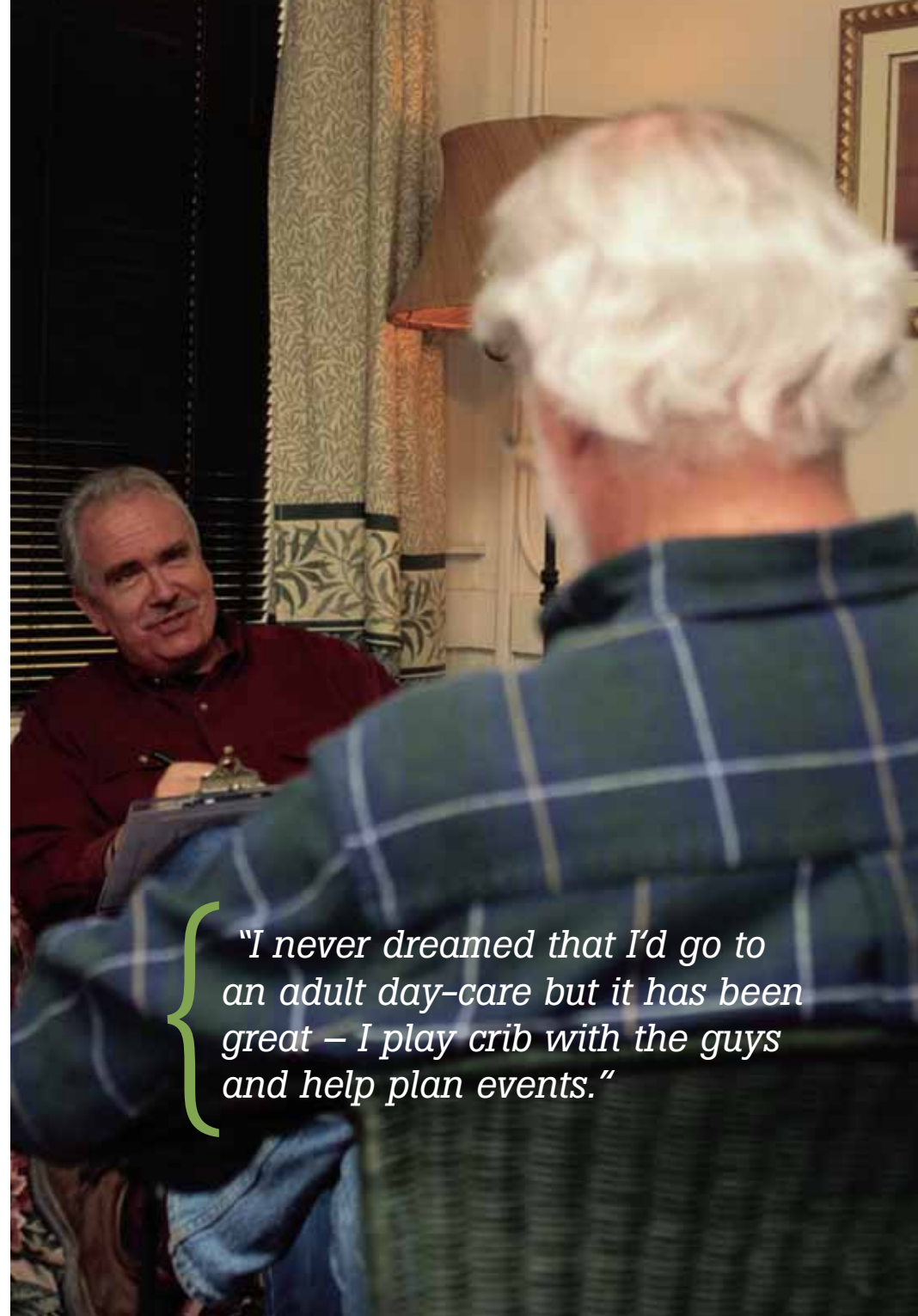
"I remembered how my mother threw herself into Church work after Dad died, so when I became a widow I did the same – focussing on helping others really helped me."

Gather information. Read about the changes you face.

"I became an expert on my disability and what I could do to help myself – I started to feel like had some control over life again."

Think about the ways you have managed change in the past and see if you can use or adapt your strategies to the current challenge.

"I used to run to keep my stress down – now I'm part of a walking group that meets in the mall."



"I never dreamed that I'd go to an adult day-care but it has been great – I play crib with the guys and help plan events."

"I used to be very socially active – when I gave up my car I became a telephone buddy for shut-ins."

"I was very anxious after my son was born, and meditation and yoga helped me through – I took them up again after I was diagnosed and reduced my stress."

Seek out others who share your experience.

"Joining the Caregiver Support Group put me in touch with people who understood what I was going through."

Staying Connected

Seniors said that maintaining relationships and remaining involved in the community are important for keeping their spirits growing.

"I make a big effort to spend time with my grand kids – they give me a lift and I like to know I am creating memories."

"Life feels shorter now – I've eased up on the kids a lot in the last few years and it has sure improved our relationships."

"The first time I went to the seniors' centre was tough – I am really shy – but I was dying of loneliness at home."



Dealing With Emotions

Seniors talked about the importance of finding ways to express feelings.

"Music helps me to express my feelings when words don't do it."

"Keeping a journal has helped me to express some of my anger and disappointment without burdening everyone around me."

"I saw a social worker who helped me to sort through the mixed up feelings, like guilt, anger and sadness, that I was feeling about putting my husband in a nursing home."

"My support group is a great place to share the humour in some of the things my husband does – anyone else would be shocked!"

"Exercise helps reduce my stress."





"We are looking into long term care insurance – that way if something happens we will still be able to leave something to the kids."

{ PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE YOU WANT }

If people don't know what you want they will do what they think is best for you – but that doesn't mean they will get it right!

There are a number of legal and informal instruments that can be useful in planning for the future. They may differ across Canada and legal advice may be needed.

In this brochure, seniors talk about using the tools available for end of life and estate planning so they can get on with the business of living.

Estate Planning

Funerals can be preplanned, prepaid and ensure that things are done your way.

"Mom had made all her own funeral arrangements – it took the emotional and financial pressure off the family."

Wills make things easier for those left behind.

"Dad left his affairs in an awful state which caused Mom a lot of stress and cost her money too."

End of Life Care

Living Wills are a place to write down the kind of end of life care you want.

"My sister was given treatment she never would have wanted and at the end she suffered."

"We didn't have to decide whether or not Mom would want to be tube fed after her stroke. She had written down what she wanted in a letter to us kids."

Be sure to tell your doctor, lawyer and family what you want and don't want, and where to find the document when the time comes.

"People don't want to hear you talk about dying – I had to insist that my children allow me to share my plans with them."

Representation Agreements allow you to appoint someone to carry out your wishes about the care you would want.

"The best thing Mom did was to appoint a Representative – she got what she wanted even when some of the kids disagreed. It stopped all the fighting in the family."

Power of Attorney allows someone to manage your financial affairs when you are not able to.

"When Harold had dementia I couldn't sell the car or truck because they were in his name."

"We had to go through a terrible long legal process to take over my sister's affairs and meanwhile she was being scammed by crooks."



Housing Choices

"We always wanted to travel but don't have much income – we invested in a membership in a home exchange and so far it's worked out OK."

"After my husband was diagnosed with Alzheimers' Disease, we bought a house with my daughter and her family – we have a self contained suite and look after ourselves for now, but in the future if we need help it will be right there."

"My son has moved back home – he has a disability – we have our own lives but look out for each other."



{ STRATEGIES FOR LOOKING AFTER THE BODY }

Good health is more than the absence of illness. It is a state of well being that comes from how we feel physically, mentally and spiritually.

"A dog is a great companion and you have to get out and walk for his sake."

"Raised beds have allowed me to keep gardening even though I am in a wheel chair."

"My arthritis doesn't allow me to do any strenuous exercise anymore, so I took up carpet bowling."

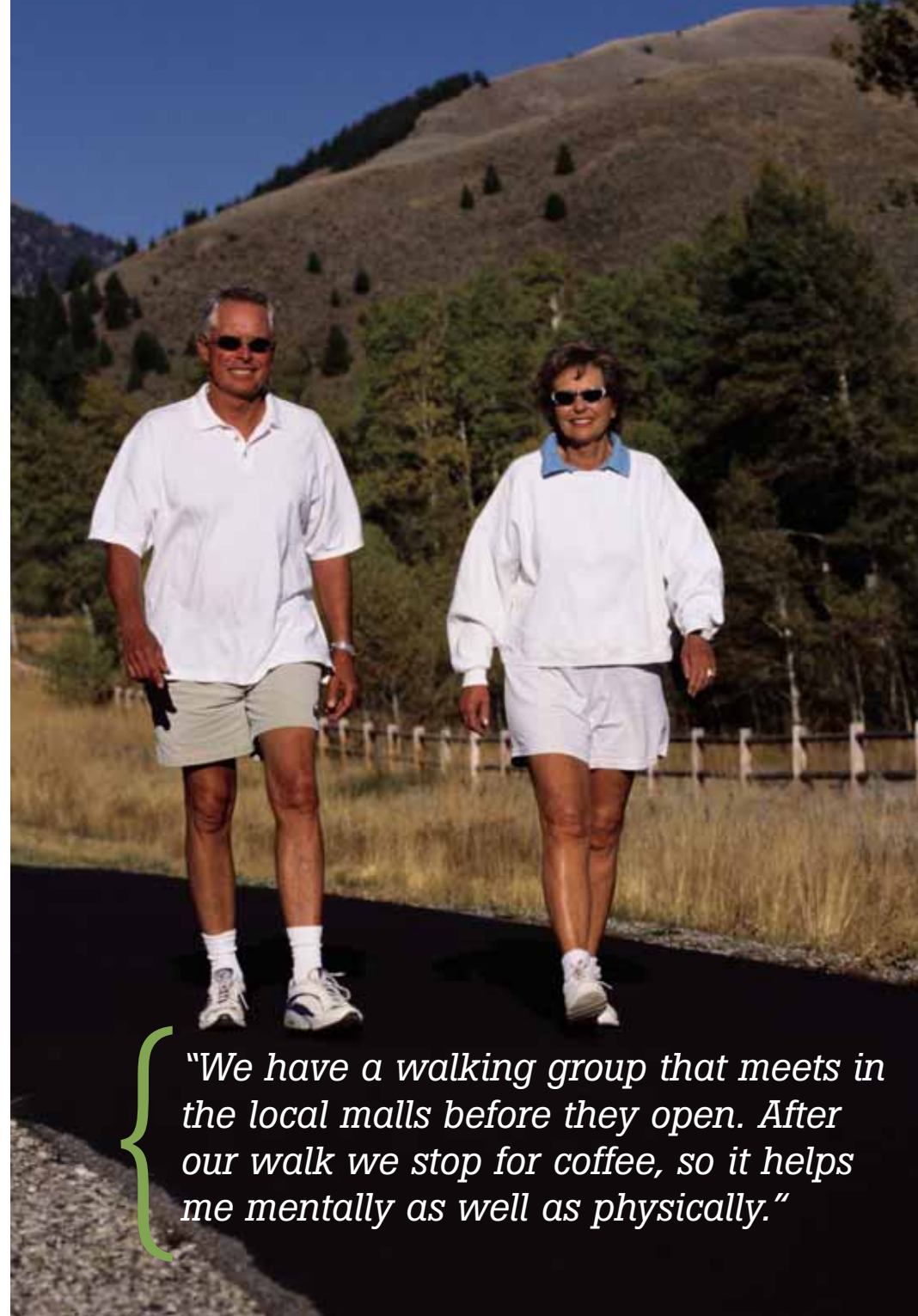
"I used to love long rambles in the woods, but can't get there since I gave up my drivers' licence. Now I walk in the city parks."

Relaxation can be found through exercise and other means.

"Tai Chi has provided me with a form of exercise that allows me to meditate at the same time. It's very relaxing."

"When I can't get back to sleep I don't fight it. I listen to music with my headphones, and eventually I drop off."

"Self-hypnosis helps me to relax and reduces my anxious feelings."



"We have a walking group that meets in the local malls before they open. After our walk we stop for coffee, so it helps me mentally as well as physically."

Good sleep promotes energy and a positive attitude.

"I was in a real bad state – not enough sleep at night so napping in the day! I finally went to see someone who taught me progressive relaxation, which has helped a lot."

"I keep myself on a pretty rigid schedule for going to bed and getting up. I never drink coffee or tea after 6:00 pm."

Nutritious food promotes good health.

"Our local grocery store has regular sessions where they talk about diet, cholesterol, bowels and the like, that are very informative."

"I have to fight my weight all the time– it's really important for my heart and my knees."

"I subscribe to a newsletter that shows how to make nutritious meals on a shoestring."

"One thing I have really taken to heart is the importance of drinking water."

"Eating properly can help with bowel regularity."

"The local health food store sells a tea that helps me keep my bowels in good working order."

Exercise is important for maintaining health. It promotes flexibility, mobility strength, energy, good sleep, regular bowels, a positive mental attitude and can reduce stress. Even with physical limitations and winter weather, it is usually possible to find some form of exercise.

"I started a walking club in our high-rise apartment block– it is a good workout because we go up and down stairs."

"I can't walk like I used to but I can burn calories with a stationery bicycle."

"I joined a seniors' weight training program to build up my bone density."



{ STRATEGIES FOR LOOKING AFTER THE SPIRIT }

Good health is more than the absence of illness. It is a state of well being that comes from how we feel physically, mentally and spiritually.

The natural world nurtures the spirit for some.

" I find Nature refreshes my spirit."

"I take every opportunity to be near water – it relaxes me."

"Seeing flowers and trees, going for a walk, these things replenish me."


Self reflection can refresh the spirit.

"I go back over my life and remember the good and bad times because they made me what I am today."

"When I feel down I remember the times that were good in the past – it puts things into perspective."

"When my limitations get to me I can always think of others who are worse off than me."

"I am writing my memoirs at my granddaughter's request. The bonus is I get to remember all the great people I have known, and things that I have done."



"Gardening was always very therapeutic for me. Since I moved to an apartment I have been lucky enough to rent a small community plot."

Religious beliefs can be comforting.

"I am very involved with my Church. It provides me with a spiritual lift and friendships."

"Prayer keeps me in touch with the Lord and I feel less alone."

"I can't get out to Church so I watch the services on TV. They are a great comfort."

"Being around people who share my language and beliefs lifts my spirits – I belong."

Positive attitudes promote well being.

"I try to keep positive and avoid negative people who drag me down."

"There is always a bright side and it is worth looking for."

"I love to sing. Being in a choir keeps me happy."

"Laughing is great for the soul! I look for every opportunity I can."

Being useful can be fulfilling.

"I have always found helping others makes me feel good about myself."

"I read the newspaper for a couple of older people in the nursing homes. Being useful is important to me."

Good relationships can promote well being.

"Being cared about and caring for others, in my mind, is the meaning of life."

"I cultivate old friends and new acquaintances."

"Family has become so important to me as I get older. I treasure the time my sisters and I have left."

"I have become more tolerant and easier to get along with as I have gotten older – I let more things go."





"I take a correspondence course every year, usually about history. Applying my mind to something is stimulating."

{ STRATEGIES FOR LOOKING AFTER THE MIND }

Good health is more than the absence of illness. It is a state of well being that comes from how we feel physically, mentally and spiritually.

Puzzles can exercise the mind.

"Cross words are a great way to build your vocabulary and your general knowledge."

"Jig saw puzzles are fun and really absorb my attention."

"Scrabble is like exercise for the mind."

Television and radio can be stimulating.

"I don't think you can over estimate the importance of keeping up to date with what is going on in the world if you want to have an active mind."

"I love the talk shows on national radio."

"There are a couple of game shows I always watch that test my memory of trivia, history and current events. They keep me on my toes."

"I have learned so much about history science and about the animal kingdom by watching TV."

Reading keeps the mind active.

"I read everything I can get my hands on."

"I am in a book club—we read a book and then discuss it."

"Audio books stimulate my imagination."

Memorization can be like aerobics for the mind.

"I memorize things like songs, poems, names of British Kings as a form of mental aerobics."

"My goal is to memorize a bible verse a week. I exercise my memory and build my spirit at the same time."

Nutritious food and regular meals contribute to a healthy mind.

"I've noticed that my husband, who has a dementia, is a lot sharper when he eats well and regularly."

"I skipped breakfast for most of my life. I only changed my ways because of my medication, but since then I've noticed I am more alert and energetic in the mornings."

Regular sleep promotes mental alertness.

"When I didn't sleep while on holidays, I really noticed how groggy I felt in the mornings. I work hard to make sure I get a good night sleep so I am in top form."

Tying new things can exercise the mind.

"I took up Bridge when I turned 70 because I wanted to stimulate my mind."

"I take a correspondence course every year, usually about history. Applying my mind to something is stimulating."

"There's a lot of challenging things you can do on a computer if you take the time to learn."

"I did my family tree using the internet and shared it with the kids."

"I play card games on the computer – it really passes the time, especially in the winter when I am on my own a lot."

Physical exercise keeps the oxygen flowing to the brain.

"I find a daily walk gives me more mental energy as well as physical energy."

For specific information about resources available in your community, contact:

{ABOUT THIS BROCHURE}

This brochure is based on the wisdom of seniors who participated in focus groups across Canada, in cities and in rural communities.

The focus groups were conducted as part of a larger project “Psychosocial Approaches to the Mental Health Challenges of Late Life”, which was funded by Health Canada, Population Health Fund, and carried out by the British Columbia Psychogeriatric Association. Visit the project website.

www.seniorsmentalhealth.ca

Brochure can be photocopied or downloaded from the website.

Disclaimer: The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the official policies of Health Canada.

