

Aging Gracefully

Contributed by Laurie B. Freeman

I have recently noticed that there are two distinct ways to deal with the aging process regardless of one's chronological age or even one's physical ailments. The primary differentiating factor is one's attitude. Is life viewed as full of opportunity and hope or is it viewed as a list of disappointments and mistakes? Ironically, how life is viewed has little to do with the actual events. Is there a future orientation and a desire for continued challenge or is there a sense of resolution that the best parts of life are over and there is nothing to look forward to in the future. The reality is that everyone has struggles later in life. Close relatives pass away, there are losses of all kinds including friends, and physical ability. No one can claim to have lived life without numerous experiences of failure and most people have some regrets. Whether you are 30 or 70, you can determine what you do with life's problems and this becomes more important the older you get. Here are some ways that you can help yourself remain positive, challenged and engaged in life even as your body's aches and pains increase.

Stay active If you've always worked and are recently retired, provide some structure to your day. Perhaps it is a lunch with friends, a golf game or a movie but be sure to plan something every day. Frequently older adults with no structure and too much free time begin to think about the past and often the past reminds them of losses. Depression is common in old age and activity helps reduce the chance of it taking hold. Continue to search for purpose in life. Think about what is important to you and can give your life meaning.

Involvement with grandchildren can be rewarding but as they grow up and become busier, they will be less available. What involvement can fulfill your needs? Maybe a church committee, volunteering for a local food bank or even offering to read with children at a local school. Think about what you can do for others versus what you can no longer do. How can you contribute to society while also getting some spiritual rewards?

Continue to challenge your mind If you can travel, take trips to places you have always wanted to visit and do some research before you go. If you are less mobile, take a trip in your imagination by continuing to read books, newspapers and stay abreast of current events. Try doing puzzles to keep your mind sharp. Take an art class, learn to knit or create something. Now you may have the time to learn to do things that you used to hire others to do.

Plan your legacy How do you want to be remembered? Write your life story. Make a scrapbook of old family pictures and label all the relatives that you know that others may not recognize. Create a family tree. If you wish, make a video recording of you telling stories that you want to be sure are passed along to future generations.

Maintain old friendships and make new ones Connections with others are life affirming. The reality in older age is that there are losses along the way so begin to be open to meeting younger people and connecting in different ways. Now is the time to begin to create the foundation for aging. All of the suggestions can have relevance regardless of your current age. Remember, you can't control life's circumstances but you can control how you react to them. Your attitude is your choice.