

Growing Old Gracefully

By Judith S. Parnes

Growing old gracefully doesn't just happen. Whether life becomes bitter or better as our years advance has much to do with both your attitude and knowledge.

Older adults can take action, even well into their 60's and 70's, to reduce the risk of developing chronic disease and avoid injury. Among beneficial behaviors: exercise, stretching, preventative measures such as flu shots and disease screening, and even a generally optimistic outlook on life.

To age gracefully, one needs to anticipate the changes that are inevitable. When these changes are not addressed, it is often adult children who find themselves dealing with both caregiving and legal issues of their elderly parent.

Elderly parents may be having trouble doing the things they used to handle effortlessly -- paying bills, driving, even taking care of their own health. But that doesn't mean they're willing to acknowledge the problem or listen to your advice. You may be similarly reluctant to raise these touchy issues. Failing to act, though, can have serious consequences.

Few things fracture a family more quickly than heated disagreements over how to care for an incapacitated parent. One key way to head off these arguments is by investing the time and coordinating that family meeting the agenda being to "talk turkey" about future care options. Creating and understanding the necessary legal documents, such as a living will, advanced medical directives, power of attorney, or medical power of attorney is vital.

Many seek no help or outside support until after a crisis situation arises or an elder suffers a severe incapacity.

An impartial third party, such as a professional geriatric care manager will be able to work with the adult child and parent to broach subjects and plan for the future. Elder Life Planning establishes preventive measures for the "well-elderly" and early planning for later-life management.

It makes little sense to spend more effort on planning the disposition of our estates after death than to assure that our wishes are respected during our final years of life. Regardless of age, Elder Life Planning is best initiated now. Proper planning will assure the effective management of your personal, healthcare and financial affairs for when you may not be in a position to do so

"Only by being educated consumers can we be better prepared for our future"

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