

Mindful living- The Secret of living long, healthy and meaningful life

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We all wish to live longer and make efforts towards living for a longest possible time. Since ancient times many anthropologists, demographers, researchers and spiritual masters have explored the secrets of long living. Every culture and religion has suggested ways to live not just a long life but a healthy and meaningful life. Two terms which are used for human life span are expectancy of life at birth and longevity.

Expectancy of life at birth is a demographic indicator which predicts the possible average life span of an individual born in a geographical area. Top five places with highest expectancy of life in the world are Monaco, Hong-Kong, Macau, Japan and Switzerland, have life expectancy of more than 85 years. India has shown a great improvement in the expectancy of life at birth from 45 years in 1960 to 70 years in 2019 but still far behind and ranks 126 in the Global list of expectancy of life at birth (Ref. World population reviews.com & WHO Data).

Longevity refers to the description of the state when a person lives beyond their average life expectancy. Living longer than average is possible for only few people. This always makes us to think about the secrets of living longer, healthier and meaningful life.

Before we open the secret lets understand what leads to ageing and death. Aging is a natural process and it involves various changes in our body with progression of age. Researchers have found that ageing is affected by genetics, gender, life-style, environment, health conditions and access to health care services. All determines the speed of aging and if unfavourable then leads to fast aging and shorter life span. Aging begins at cellular level and invisible to us but once it is visible it is a bit difficult to halt and reverse it, hence we need to make efforts in advance to protect our health.

Health is not just absence of disease but it includes physical, mental and social wellbeing. Here are some secrets of protecting and promoting our health and thereby living a longer, healthier and meaningful life.

Mindful use of Resources- . “First learn to earn and then spend mindfully”.

Managing life is all about managing your resources and to manage your resources you need to manage your behaviour. These resources are money, material, manpower, minutes (time) and above all motivation (desire to live longer). Research on longevity has mentioned that economic development is a crucial factor to live longer, as it facilitates healthy lifestyle and access to health care services.

- **Earn money** for economic independence. Those who are economically independent can have choices and can take health decisions appropriate for their life.
- **Always give priority to health**, while spending money. Spend money on nutritious diet, hygiene, sanitation, healthful housing, and physical activities.
- **Save money** for health care needs and emergencies.
- **Time is money**. Life span is the time duration of living and living longer than average needs efficient use of time. Schedule all your activities according to your priorities including your personal and professional purposes.
- **Maintain work life balance** Follow regular routine but to break the monotony plan holidays.
- Follow the rule of 8+8+8 – 8 hours of honest hard work + 8 hours of good sleep+ 8 hours of other/leisure activities.

Mindful eating behaviour- “Mind your tongue and live longer and young”

No one wants to miss an opportunity to eat favourite food items. Mouth watering, nicely decorated food with mind-blowing aroma is extremely tempting and irresistible. The Role of nutrition and diet is well recognized in maintaining health and preventing diseases like diabetes, hypertension, and heart diseases. Certain food items are identified as anti-aging or slow down aging. Despite ample amount of knowledge, eating behaviours remain uncontrolled. Changing behaviour requires changing age old believes, misconceptions and eating habits. Some tips for healthy diet and eating behaviour-

- Include food from 5 food groups – cereals, pulses or egg/meat, vegetable, fruits & milk products
- Stop eating when stomach is 80% full
- Smallest meal in late afternoon or early evening
- Observe Intermittent fasting
- Stop eating food which is fried, spicy, preserved, highly processed food, tinned food, food with high fat content, refined carbs, sugar, high salt content, containing artificial colors/flavours etc.
- Limit eating five whites – flour, salt, sugar, ghee/butter, white rice
- Stop binge eating and eating snacks in between meals.
- Follow Mediterranean diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, olive oil and fish.

Mindful physical activity- “No gain without pain except weight gain”

Doing nothing is a luxury but it costs you heavily. Stay physically active to maintain body weight and body shape. It is suggested to move naturally. To live longer it is not necessary to do any heavy exercise or join gymnasium or to walk 10000 footsteps a day. Moving naturally, means that you do daily household chores yourself, move for your personal activities like shopping, playing with your children or your pet. Move out for socialising, nurture hobbies involving physical activity. Even very fine and little movements like holding, twisting, turning, grasping, squeezing, pushing or pulling small things and clapping can make you physically active and flexible.

Sometimes you should test your physical resilience by participating in adventurous activities or walking to a pilgrimage. This not only helps you to stay fit but gives you a sense of achievement and mental satisfaction. Being physically active prevents lifestyle diseases, delays aging and helps you to live long independent life.

Mindful social behaviour – “A person is identified by his company”

Connecting with people, improves your chances of survival for longer period. Nowadays with advanced information technology, it is possible to connect with people from distance but this is leading to disconnect with near ones and dear ones. It is important to socialise wisely. Under-socialising or over socialising and inappropriate socialising have health implications. Habits, beliefs, health decisions and behaviours are socially influenced. The first lessons of healthy living are nurtured in the family a person is born and brought up. For living longer, mind your social behaviour and follow some tips

- Give priority to your loved ones, spent quality time with your family, stay with aging people, be committed to your life partner and love your children.
- Develop and maintain relations with positive people who can contribute in your life to lead a socially and economically productive life.
- Identify toxic people or negative people around you and don't allow them to spoil your mental health. Always create boundaries for your safety.
- Stay away from anti-social elements who are mostly indulged in to addictions, criminal activities and social misconduct as they influence your behaviour.
- Stay away from addictions which may be to any substance like tobacco/alcohol or behaviours like addiction to social media.
- Married people live longer than singles, so get married. This is a lifelong company and ensures social and economic support. As a human being one has emotional needs and a good life partner is bliss.
- Add happy moments to life as it contributes to good mental health. Identify activities which make you happy and healthy these are your stress busters. Your hobbies keep you going for longer.

- One has to be very wise to maintain social ties and it requires qualities like understanding people and reacting appropriately. Being honest in relationships is important for maintaining relations.
- Being considerate and helping others is likely to get reciprocated.
- For good relations and peace of mind Stay away from these evils –over- expectations, anger, greed, envy, grudge, lust, laziness and ego.
- Gratitude is a quality of a person's character which makes him/her realize the importance of others in their life, hence always show gratitude.
- Stay connected with divine. Being spiritual gets you more social connections and helps you to cope-up with the challenges in your life.

Mindful planning of future- "Failing to plan is planning to fail"

- **Set realistic short term and long term goals in your life and pursue them with a strategy.**
- **Develop your capacities and prepare your time plan and action plan.**
- **Take Action.** Ideas and plans may inspire but actions are needed to achieve goals.
- **Stop Procrastination.** It is a habit of unnecessarily and voluntarily delaying or postponing actions.

Stay blessed, live a long, healthy, happy and meaningful life

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