
The Art of Growing Older

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THE ART OF GROWING OLDER

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Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life for which the
 first was made;
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God;
 see all, nor be afraid!"

Robert Browning.

WE ARE NOT GETTING YOUNGER

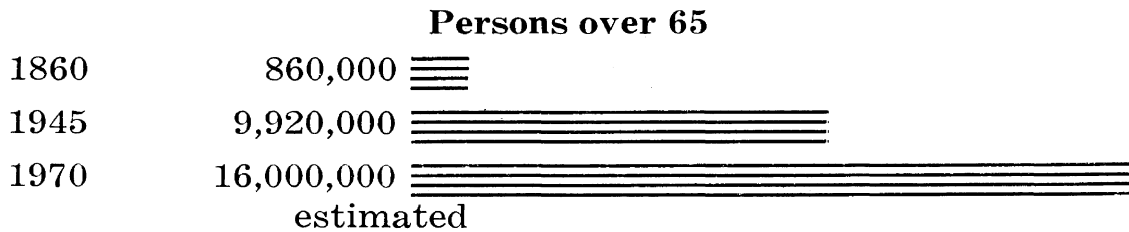
There is an art to growing older. None of us are getting any younger. So why not plan to make the best of it? If you would ask a teen-ager what he is going to do ten years from now he would be full of plans and eager to tell them. If many adults were asked the same questions what would the answer be?

Someone said, "What you are to be, you are now becoming." That statement is just as important for adults as for children. Just as the day by day experiences of the younger person influences his living, so does the interests, attitudes and satisfactions of later years depend upon what we are doing now. Our lives are just like the bricks in a wall. We have to lay today's brick before tomorrow's can be placed or there is a weakness in the wall. The mature adult person looks backward from the things learned and enjoys the pleasant memories, but all of his looking is not backward. He looks forward and plans for the days ahead.

PEOPLE LIVE LONGER

Statistics show that people live longer than in the years gone by. Less than fifty years ago the average person in the United States lived to celebrate their forty-fifth birthday. It's estimated that if medical science continues to prolong lives and families continue to have fewer children, in twenty-five or

thirty years, we will have more old people than young people and that the average person of today will live to be eighty years old and one hundred years of age will not be unusual. These population trends are indicated in this picture graph:



These things are interesting to all of us but the big thing is not how long we live but how well we live and as we stated earlier the things we are doing now will determine the quality of our later years—our participation in community activities and our friends. These help us to be a rounder personality when our families require less from us.

LIFE BRINGS CHANGES

Physical

All of us change as we grow older. Part of these changes are physical, but we differ in our rate of ageing. The entire body doesn't become old all at once—it's a single organ or tissue that that starts. Often the eye ages first and it occurs quite early, hearing usually becomes less acute in the twenties and muscular coordination is said to be past its peak at the age of thirty. The history of athletes indicates this. What if we can't walk as fast as we used to! One can go more slowly; rest more often. We can change our pace and enjoy "The Pause that Refreshes." We know we have to use our will power and judgment not to over-tax our physical strength.

It is always wise at any age to remember that a regular physical check-up is important. Infection can replace enthusiasm. A wise person said, "The way to grow old is to lose enthusiasm." Another place we read that a man is as old as his fear and nobody grows old merely by living a number of years. People grow old by deserting their ideals. Years wrinkle the skin but giving up enthusiasm wrinkles the soul.

It's difficult to say which is more important — mental or physical health. Likely we all know someone who takes their

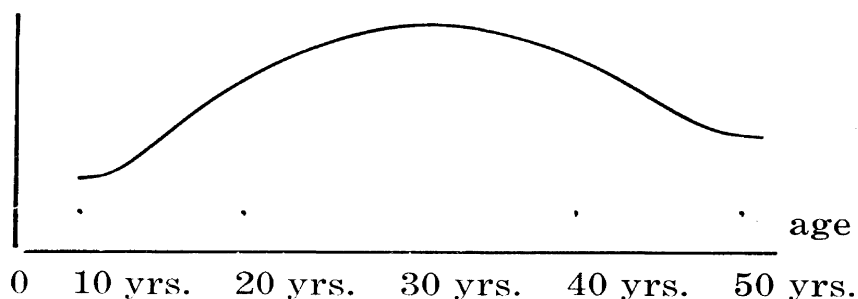
vitamins and exercises faithfully and disregards mental health.

We, at all times, need to keep in the right frame of mind. Doctors have found that mental health is very important in promoting good health. We should not let worry live with us. It is wise to face our problems promptly if they are ones we can solve. They should be forgotten just as promptly if beyond our control. We can teach ourselves to adopt an attitude of optimistic reasonableness to help us maintain good health.

Mental Changes

Even though we lose physical strength and efficiency, there is one part of the body which increases in its efficiency—this is the brain. If we keep active mentally our brain still has the power to serve us better than in our earlier years. We may not learn quite as fast but past experiences and reasoning power has developed to a greater extent. It is never too late to learn. Older people can learn very well if they have not developed habits of mental laziness. You may have heard the saying “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” Maybe not but adults can learn plenty. We are using a chart following which is an investigation on learning by Thorndike:

ABILITY TO LEARN



People who study learning have found that older people do learn and acquire knowledge and skills just as well as young folks. Acquiring new ideas may take a little longer after forty. New skills may be acquired later about as easily as in the teenage. The important factors in learning are individual ability, interest, energy and opportunity.

Sometimes the older person has an advantage in solving problems. Our past experiences and mature judgment are helpful in solving problems.

We can continue to learn if we desire to do so. We might profit from the prayer of the negro preacher, "Dear Lord, please prop us up on our learning side."

Social Changes

Our changes in social relationship at this time are very important. Our children are growing up and away from home, establishing homes of their own—in other words, the parents have come to the place where they are "two" again. It's sometimes very hard for parents to let go of grown children. It's instinctive for us to think that they are our children and that we should supervise their actions and decisions. The task for us at this stage is to be a friend and advisor when advice is asked. It's about this time that other activities need to take a part of our time.

The heavy demands of family members of earlier years are lessened. We have fewer family responsibilities and sometimes when the last youngster has left the house we feel that the bottom has fallen out of the world. The emotionally mature person can make this adjustment though it's a difficult one.

WHAT CAUSES PEOPLE TO GROW OLD BEFORE THEIR TIME

What causes people to grow old before their time? I am sure that most of us would agree that it is attitudes and adjustments or rather lack of adjustments that causes people to grow old before their time. An example of living gloriously rather than growing old was the conclusion of a letter from a woman to her niece recently. She said, "Soon I will be 85. I am not that old. I have just lived that long." This woman had not taken growing old as a matter of course and forgotten to live. Could we grow old because we allow homemaking to take all of our time and lose contact with friends, neighbors and the community? Could another reason be that we have grown stale in our thinking and in a rut in our way of things. Failure to see new sights and mixing with people not only narrows but confines us. If people live too much to themselves, naturally their interest centers around themselves and their family. They are only in contact with their own and of course are inclined to have little interest and no patience with new ideas. Sometimes

the world is going to the dogs as far as they are concerned. The thing for us to do is to look, listen and do. If we hear of a new idea, how nice to say, "I never thought of that before, tell me more about it."

EARNING EXTRA DIVIDENDS FROM LIFE

All of us want to get more out of life and no one can give us a recipe to solve this because one person's solution would not fit another. Each must find his answer because no two people are alike. We can all live fully and intensely day by day. We should have useful interests, activities and hobbies and be continuously learning something. We must master the ups and downs of everyday living and meet life's bigger problems. An important need for all of us is to be needed, to feel that we have a worthwhile contribution to make. Was there ever a time when people who are well adjusted, have a good will and knowledge were not needed? Older people who have these qualifications can by their example give courage and confidence to others. Our communities never have too many leaders of this sort.

One can be alert to guide himself out of mental ruts by his association with alert people. Good mental health depends upon keeping in direct touch with human affairs. The older person, freed from earlier heavy responsibilities, can keep this association with others alive by serving others of his community, his church, fraternal or other groups.

There is a lot of satisfaction in serving others.

"He who takes but never gives,
May last for years; but never lives."

An example once used on giving was that of two seas. The beautiful sea of Galilee takes water from the river that flows through fertile farm lands down to its mouth and gives this water back to the river that flows on past and feeds the farm lands on beyond, while the Dead Sea only takes. The water flows into this sea and stays, stagnates and no living thing can survive in its water. So it is in our lives.

We should always keep active either mentally or physically. Now we do not mean continuously but rather to live in this manner, not just to sit, rock and feel sorry for ourselves.

Our personal appearance means a lot. It does build morale. On the other hand it's rather easy to grow careless about our appearance if we stay rather closely at home. An untidy appearance helps to speed up old age. If we lose our self respect others begin to think of us as an old lady who has lost interest in life.

Never forget a sense of humor. Rather try to cultivate it. It's a true saying, "If we laugh, the world laughs with us," and of course you know the other one about, "if we weep, we weep alone."

We mentioned hobbies earlier. Have you ever known anyone who said, "In the future I will learn a hobby." There is no time like the present. If we wait for that distant future to develop a hobby, it may not start. Hobbies help countless people to get a keener enjoyment out of living. One may collect and mount butterflies or autumn leaves, raise flowers or do other types of collections. Remember it is the spirit behind the collecting that counts rather than the collection itself.

A long life is a reward. Yet do we expect homage only because we have survived many years and experienced many things? Past achievements do not exempt us from the present. Our own or our family history is important to us but so is your listener's to him. We should develop the art of conversation in present needs and not dwell on the past.

A Greek philosopher said, "Employment is nature's best physician and essential to human happiness. Ever necessary is: a plan, a task and freedom."

"To be seventy years young is sometimes far more cheerful and hopeful than to be forty years old." Oliver Wendell Holmes.

Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics. The Oklahoma A. and M. College and the United States Department of Agriculture Cooperating. Distributed in Furtherance of the Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914.