

AGING SAFELY in Your Home

**Yvonne Poulin and
Gordon Morrison**



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Dedication

To our elderly family, friends, and clients who face the challenges of aging courageously; with dignity, grace, and a healthy dose of humor. We dedicate this book to you and to the many seniors who are proving that it is possible to age safely in their homes.



Introduction

“Aging won’t happen to us; we will choose how to age.”

— Unknown

We were almost finished writing this book when Gord saw an elderly woman with an enormous smile. She was using a walker and seemed to be cruising along quite comfortably. She appeared to be aging well and contentedly. I had to laugh when I focused on her T-shirt and read the printed message that seemed a testament to her vibrant outlook on life: “I got 99 problems but age ain’t one of them”! At that moment Gord realized that how we age is a choice. We can’t stop aging but we can always have a positive attitude about it.

Aging is a fact of life and the smiling lady brought me full circle to why we wanted to write this book. We’re both aging and we’d like to do it with grace and dignity. We both wish to choose how we age. As

50-somethings, we are considered seniors in many parts of the world. In fact, it was somewhat shocking four years ago when Gord received a senior's discount at a buffet in the state of Washington! Woo-hoo!

We wish to continue our positive approach to aging and we want to inspire other seniors to take an active role in their aging process, despite the fact you may have 99 problems to deal with. Lucky for you, this is a book of solutions. These solutions can help you with aging safely in your home and maybe even put a smile on your face.

From the moment we began this book, we envisioned each chapter as a piece of a puzzle. Some aspects of the puzzle are more important than others. Having the right attitude, keeping fit, and preventing falls are enormously important. Our puzzle has a person in the middle surrounded by his or her home that keeps him or her safe and secure. Anyone who's done a puzzle knows that the joy is in the journey, not the final destination. We hope that our readers will embrace the journey of aging safely because it's an ongoing, an evolving, a dynamic, and an ever-changing adventure.

Your physical, social, emotional, mental, and spiritual reality today might not be the same tomorrow. You'll need to keep rearranging the pieces of your puzzle because you'll change as you age. Certain pieces of your aging puzzle will need more attention than others, depending on your situation at the time. This book will help you be a person who's safe and secure in your own home.

Each chapter will contribute to helping you make smart and safe choices about how you live and where you live as you age. We have provided some solutions regarding what needs to be done and how to get things done. We're hopeful that the book helps everyone find or create the right environment and home for aging safely.

You will notice that the book is written in two parts: Part 1 discusses the human aspect, and Part 2 discusses the housing aspect. The two sections recommend adaptations that will greatly enhance your ability and suitability to age safely at home. We believe these parts are interconnected to such a degree that they are needed in equal measure for aging safely in your home. The two parts will read slightly differently because they were written by different authors. *Aging Safely in Your Home* is the combined perspective of an elder-care planner and an architectural technologist.

Yvonne Poulin, as a Registered Massage Therapist and Elder Planning Counsellor, has a wide-ranging, cross-disciplinary education and

experience in the human aspect. Her 25 years of clinical experience is reflected in the recommendations she makes for health and wellness, and she refers to the insights gained from her patients and clients who have demonstrated the best ways to deal with aging and disability issues. She is the director of Vancouver Dementia Care Consulting, the company through which this project originated. Yvonne has a personal history of caring for her aging parents who were eventually affected by dementia. She also shares her experience in adapting environments and mind-sets to overcome physical challenges.

Yvonne's voice will guide you through Part 1: Human Aspect of Aging Safely in Your Home — Personal Adaptations. Four broad categories will be discussed to enable you to age actively:

1. **Physical:** Be physically prepared to age safely in your home.
2. **Social:** Get support and maintain an active social network to help you age safely in your home.
3. **Emotional:** Plan to stay happily in your home.
4. **Mental and spiritual:** Keep mentally fit and nourish your spirit.

Gordon Morrison, as an architectural technologist and industrial technology educator, has a wide-ranging, cross-disciplinary education and experience in the housing aspect. He understands the value of a well thought out, well-designed, and well-built home environment. He's helped many people make home adaptations and renovations for their specific needs, and has worked on many housing improvement projects for seniors so they can age safely and thrive in their homes.

Gordon's voice will guide you through Part 2: Housing Aspect of Aging Safely in Your Home. Five broad categories will be discussed to make your home safe and suitable for you as you age:

1. **Rate your home:** Evaluate whether to stay or move.
2. **Make your home comfortable:** Create comfort and security.
3. **Adapt your home:** Make adaptations to simplify your life.
4. **Renovate your home:** Re-create your home as you age.
5. **Prevent falls:** Recognize problems and find solutions.

The two parts of this book have been written knowing that the overwhelming majority of seniors prefer to remain at home and in their familiar neighborhoods. Unfortunately, many seniors are forced to leave their homes prematurely due to falls and other factors. These

unwanted situations could be either prevented or delayed through personal and home adaptations that would enable them to stay healthy and well in their current homes. The main intent of this book is to help people stay in their home as long as possible. A secondary intent is to help guide seniors, caregivers, friends, and family toward knowing when staying in the home is not the best or safest choice. Knowing when things are unmanageable is important and this book will help you assess that.

The World Health Organization defines good health as “a state of complete physical, social and mental well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”¹ Based on this definition of good health, we believe that a holistic approach is imperative. This book is more than a manual about home adaptations; it’s about informing seniors of the various factors that affect their ability to age safely at home. We directly address the barriers to aging well: Physical (including the dwelling), social, mental, emotional, and spiritual isolation.

We should point out that this book has been written for seniors who are experiencing normal aging. There are many complicating factors and situations that are caused by illness or disease. They bring into the picture some special considerations that must be addressed on a case-by-case basis, preferably under the care of medical experts and care-support experts.

We are trying to point you in the right direction to get the kinds of personal and housing adaptations that will empower you to age safely in your home. This book is not a construction manual for retro-fitting your home. We do not endorse any products or services. We are simply trying to help you put the pieces of the puzzle together and help you to understand the kinds of changes that will help you as you age.

This book includes a variety of checklists, worksheets, and diagrams, which will be most useful to you if you complete the forms. (Use the download kit to print the forms and complete them by hand or by using your computer’s Word program — link included at the end of this book.) Highlight parts of the book that are particularly relevant for you, or write some helpful suggestions from the book and place them on your fridge as daily reminders. Complete the Rate Yourself and Rate Your Home checklists to help you assess and monitor what adaptations need to be made in your current situation. It is wise to review these checklists on an ongoing basis because your circumstances are likely to change regularly.

1 World Health Organization, accessed February 2015. <http://www.who.int/trade/glossary/story046/en/>

If any of your answers on the rating worksheets are “no,” read the corresponding information in that chapter for suggestions on how to change your answers to a “yes.” You may be surprised by what a positive difference it can make to follow these recommendations.

If you, or the senior you are concerned about, are unable or unwilling to make the changes required to age safely, then it is time to move to a more suitable living situation. We’ve included an Appendix entitled Signs That It’s Time to Move to help you determine if a senior requires professional assistance or a change in housing.

We use simple and conversational language throughout the book. There are some issues of language and terms that might need clarification. For example, a common industry term for aging safely in your home is “remaining in place” or “aging in place.” Another example is our use of the word “tribe”; we refer to your tribe as your social network, related or otherwise, who help support you through your aging process. We have tried to keep our terms of reference relevant to all readers. This will not always be the case. For example, offering the suggestion to keep walkways clear of snow and sanded during the winter might not be helpful to someone living in Key West, Florida. Also, construction practices and techniques do vary from region to region so you might need to read between the lines to sort out what’s relevant for your location.

No matter where you live or what stage you’re at in your journey, creating the right human and housing aspects for aging safely in your home is a customized journey requiring you and/or your caregivers to do most of the work. We believe that with a positive attitude, aging safely in your home can be a pleasant and rewarding experience. We encourage you to join us as we look for T-shirts that say: “I got 99 problems but age ain’t one of them.” We like the image of us all wearing the right attitude for aging safely in our home. Together we can make it work.

part 1



Human Aspect of Aging Safely in Your Home — Personal Adaptations

chapter 1



Be Physically Prepared to Age Safely in Your Home

Are you concerned about your health and wellness as you age? Will your ability to remain independent in your home be affected? Are your loved ones concerned for you? Or do you simply assume everything will be fine?

It is easy to overlook the level of physical fitness that is required to age safely in your home, but you need to be prepared for the physical changes that will occur in your future. You might not even consider it if in the past getting around and managing your place was something you did easily. Perhaps you didn't have to think twice about reaching for a vase on the top shelf, moving the lawn mower out of the way, or even reaching for your towel while getting out of the shower. You may have taken for granted your ability to look out the front window to notice who parked across the street. It's possible that a few years ago

you quickly responded to the sound of a kettle spouting. When you would get minor cuts or bruises they would heal quickly. As time goes by, your senses and reflexes may not be as sharp. You're probably not as physically strong or agile as you once were.

Physical aging is a gradual process that we may not be aware of until one day we can no longer do something that used to be second nature. How and where we've lived, what cards we've been dealt in terms of genetics, previous injuries and disease also factor into our physical health. Physical aging is natural and inevitable. Virtually every system in our body is affected. To put it simply, the parts are gradually wearing out. Fortunately, it is within your power to slow down and, in some cases, reverse the effects of the aging process. This chapter stresses the importance of playing an active role in your health care and getting regular checkups to gain insight and direction to improve your health.

When parts start to wear out, it is time to adapt our behaviors. The process of adapting to a new level of physical ability can be seen as either a chore or an adventure. It is up to you to choose which attitude will be most helpful when facing your challenges. You may not believe that staying in your own home involves any challenge. The truth is it does take a clear mind and a certain degree of strength, coordination, and vitality to stay in even the most age-friendly home. You don't need to become a senior fitness model, but you do need to be at your best possible level of health in order to maintain independence and be capable of aging safely in your home.

The best possible state of health a person can achieve regardless of his or her individual challenges is described as optimal health. It varies from person to person, and is a moving target that changes with a person's age as well as physical, mental, emotional, and social factors. In my 25 years of clinical practice, the happiest seniors and persons with disabilities are those who constantly adjust to those moving targets with a positive attitude.

Attitude is essential, and there are many things you can do to obtain your optimal level of health at any age. This applies even if you are already at a disadvantage with mobility or other health issues. The degree of challenge will vary from person to person. For example, some of you may already be eating a healthy diet but not exercising. Others may assume they are healthy but have not seen their dentist in two years. Regardless of your starting point, it is always possible to make yourself as healthy as you can be. Do not be discouraged by nature's inevitable way. Aging happens, but there are many factors to physical

health that you can have a positive impact on. Having a winning attitude about your physical fitness involves embracing the challenge of making personal adaptations where required, and putting time and energy into achieving your optimal health.

Eating a healthy diet is one of the most important factors that you can control, and may be an area where you need to make personal adaptations. Proper nutrition is important at any age. How well you eat affects how well you age. Section 3 provides a simple visual diagram to help you make wise choices plus some tips for eating healthy.

Other factors that will impact your physical fitness are your ability to manage your medications and pain. The majority of seniors take more than one medication for their various health conditions or to control chronic pain. Chronic pain has been described as a silent epidemic, and this is especially true for seniors. But there is no need to suffer in silence. With proper use of medications and good pain management you can improve your ability to engage in a fulfilling lifestyle. In section 4, you will gain information on how take your medications properly, work with your health-care team to achieve your health goals, and discover techniques to prevent and treat your pain. It is possible to free yourself from pain and have a zest for life!

Getting quality sleep also factors into your physical fitness. Sleep is not an indulgence; your body needs time to rest and recharge. During sleep our bodies regulate hormones that affect the way our cells function. Try following the healthy sleep habits listed in section 6 to get the rest you need to rejuvenate your body.

The question you must ask yourself is: Am I ready to meet the challenge of reaching my optimal health that will allow me to age safely in my home? In this chapter we suggest ways for you to address the physical factors that only you can control. You will learn what is required in order to reach your optimal level of physical health. At the end of the chapter you will find Checklist 1: Rate Yourself: Physical Activity, which you can use to evaluate whether or not you meet the criteria for maintaining your optimal physical health.

1. Get Regular Checkups

Many people believe that the only time to see their doctor is when they're not feeling well. In other words, they view the doctor as a professional who treats illness as opposed to someone who advises them on how to maintain their health and prevent disease.

If you are one of those people, it is time to shift your viewpoint if you wish to age in a healthy manner. Imagine being at the head of a table in a boardroom with your doctor and your other health practitioners. You work together as a health-care team to promote your health and wellness. Your role as the lead team member is to monitor and treat anything that is a barrier to you aging well. Your other team members advise you on the best way to go about this. Your doctor is one of the many health practitioners available to help you achieve optimal health.

Another example would be to think in terms of vehicle maintenance. The driver chooses when to get his or her vehicle serviced. One driver brings her car in for regular check-ups to monitor the brakes, oil, and various operating systems. A different driver waits until his truck's motor isn't functioning well or there's black smoke coming out of the hood. If your body was a vehicle, which driver would you rather have making choices about your maintenance? Just as the black smoke indicates an obvious (and possibly delayed) time to see your mechanic; pain, illness, and low energy are signs (also possibly delayed) that it's time to see your medical doctor.

1.1 Visit your medical doctor

All signs and indicators to seek medical advice are not obvious. There are many health conditions in the body that are “hidden under the surface.” Key tests are needed on a regular basis to determine your blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol levels. There may be other tests required based on your individual medical history. If you have not had these tests in the past year, call your doctor's office and request to book in for a full checkup. Your medical doctor will advise you about what you need to do and when to rebook. Aging well physically requires that we know ourselves both inside and out.

1.2 Visit your dentist

Many of us think we only need to see the dentist if we feel there is a cavity. Once again, there is more “hidden under the surface” in oral health, especially in our senior years. Smokers need to be extra vigilant in maintaining oral health, as they are more vulnerable to cavities as well as disease.

As we get older, we enter a second round of cavity-prone years. There are several reasons for this. Our vision is reduced, so we may not see a build-up of plaque or receding gums. Our nerves become less

sensitive, so we may not feel the pain or the hot and cold sensitivity that is associated with having a cavity. Our circulation is diminished, so the body cannot repair as quickly. A common side-effect in more than 500 medications is dry mouth, which can cause tooth decay and gum disease. Each one of these factors creates an environment where cavities can rapidly progress. The best advice to prevent oral infection and disease is to see your dentist once every six months.

1.3 Visit your complementary health practitioners

Over the years you may have learned what types of therapies or treatments work best for you. Your health-care team may include Massage Therapists, Naturopathic Doctors, Chiropractors, Physiotherapists, Acupuncturists, or Occupational Therapists (to name a few). Continue to see those professionals who are licensed to treat seniors and their specific issues. Keep your team informed of any changes in your health or medications and never be afraid to let them know if an area is painful or uncomfortable.

2. Exercise Regularly

Exercising may be the most challenging of all the physical criteria for ability to remain at home. Don't despair. Try to maintain a positive attitude by considering this as an adventure not a chore. Keep in mind that exercise can mean anything from consciously stretching and reaching while unloading the dishwasher to running a marathon. The goal is to obtain your optimal physical health while taking into consideration whatever challenges you face.

If you are not already living an active lifestyle, and exercise seems like a lot of effort and work to you; it is time to have a serious talk with yourself. If you are determined to stay at home, then channel some energy into keeping physically fit. Remember your health-team model. Health professionals can only support you by giving advice, but it's up to you to follow their suggestions.

Here are some important reasons you should exercise in order to age safely in your home:

- ✓ Muscular strength will empower you to deal with your day-to-day chores around the house.
- ✓ Coordination and balance are essential to prevent falls. Falling is the number one cause of hospitalization due to injuries in seniors.

- ✓ Healthy bone density can protect you from serious injuries if you do fall.
- ✓ Good cardiovascular health will increase your longevity and improve your sense of well-being.
- ✓ Physical fitness and mental health go hand in hand. Stay fit in body, mind, and spirit. Begin today!

Getting started can be the hardest part, so it's okay to take baby steps in the beginning. Start by informing yourself about the best activities for your age and current level of health. Ask your medical doctor or complementary health practitioner what he or she would advise for you. You can also check with your local community or seniors' center to see if there's a licensed exercise specialist who can advise you about what is available and appropriate for you.

Once you know your options, pick activities that are enjoyable to you. This takes the "chore" out of the equation. Try choosing some activities that make you focus while you do them, as this can create a welcomed mental break from your worries or concerns.

One of my great joys in life is to do exercise that makes me feel I've had a mini-vacation. I sometimes get a bit down during the rainy, gray winter months in Vancouver. The best medicine for me is to take the gondola up Grouse Mountain and go snowshoeing with my friends. High above the clouds and into the bright snow there are often clear skies and beautiful views. Sometimes it's a winter wonderland scene with snow falling. Either way, it's a break from the bleak city weather below the clouds and a way to keep fit while having fun with friends.

Household chores can be considered exercise when done with the intent to improve coordination, strength, and balance. For example, you may be able to unload your dishwasher easily in five minutes. What if you purposely made the most out of the gentle twisting and reaching actions by taking one item at a time instead of handfuls at a time? Stretch out this household activity to fifteen minutes and make it part of your exercise regime for that day.

Participate in an exercise class or do an activity with a friend at least twice per week. Scheduled group exercise may help you stick to a routine as well as provide incentive to participate. You may gain more out of the social aspect of group exercise than doing individual activities. If you prefer individual activities, make sure you vary your exercise by focusing on different activities on different days.

For seniors, daily exercise is more beneficial than infrequent bouts of intense exercise. A half-hour a day of moderate walking, swimming, or raking leaves can reduce the risk of diabetes and heart disease, lower blood pressure, and increase longevity.

Caution: People who are naturally competitive may push themselves too hard, especially when comparing their performance to others in a group setting. The majority of sports-related injuries I treat with massage therapy are caused by patients who have not adequately conditioned their muscles for the intensity of activity they are trying to perform. Keep in mind that your body's flexibility, endurance, and strength naturally decrease with age. Your attitude may need to adapt to new limitations. This doesn't mean "slacking off," but instead altering the intensity or frequency at which you exercise. Build your capacity slowly and gradually in order to attain your optimal fitness without injuries or setbacks.

Do proper gentle stretching before and after each activity to reduce the likelihood of exercise-related pain or injury. Go slow and don't overdo it. Relax into the stretch and breathe deeply. Do not force or try to push the muscles into a length you were once able to attain. Listen to what your body is comfortable with today.

Last, but not least: Be sure to drink plenty of water during and/or after exercise. This is a great way to increase your stamina, flush out toxins, and replenish your fluids.

3. Eat a Healthy Diet

We literally are what we eat. I'm sure you've heard this before. The foods we ingest will fuel our bodies to carry out our every function in life, from breathing, sleeping, and concentrating, to moving around. Having a good diet is essential to keeping ourselves physically fit enough to stay safely at home.

Why is it so hard to implement healthy changes into our diet if we know what fuels are best for us? I believe it is because we are creatures of habit. Year after year we pick the same items and brands from the grocery shelves. We have a repertoire of foods we like and we gravitate towards what's easy to prepare. This is not such a good thing if our choices include a lot of processed foods, or if our selection cannot provide a balanced diet. We may already know what foods we should be eating, yet we choose what is familiar and convenient.

The issue of convenience is a hurdle because eating well takes time. Whole foods such as fruits, vegetables, and grains simply take more time to prepare. Perhaps time management is a factor in your food choices; but investing your time in your own health and nutrition is a wise thing to do.

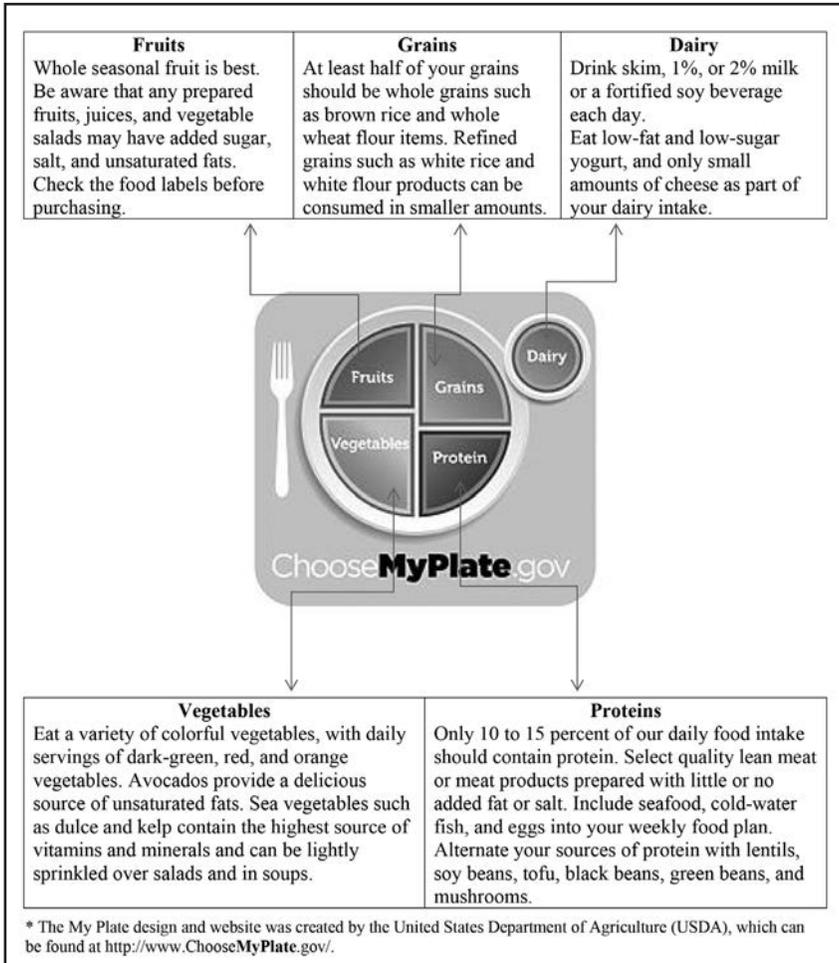
As a health practitioner I have a clear understanding of the positive effects a good diet has on human function. I am also aware of the consequences of not eating properly, so I choose to make the time to prepare healthy food. If you wish to age safely at home, you will need to make the time to prepare or adjust to a healthy diet. It is never too late to fuel your body properly. Eating better will lead to feeling better.

This diet section explains your best food choices and how to balance them based on the food guides promoted by the World Health Organization. Diagram 1 represents the recommended percentage of portions per daily food intake. Please consult your own country's food guide for suggested daily amounts specific to your age and gender. Also, consult your doctor if you have any condition that requires special diet considerations.

The following include some tips for healthy eating:

- ✓ Save time. Make larger portions of foods that will freeze well and save them for another day. Wash and cut three days' worth of carrot and celery sticks and have them ready and visible in your fridge. Wash whole fruit and vegetables in advance so they are quicker to prepare.
- ✓ Purchase your groceries to reflect the food categories as illustrated in Diagram 1. Dried foods such as grains and legumes can be purchased in larger amounts and stored. Fresh foods such as fruits, vegetables, and dairy products can be bought biweekly or weekly.
- ✓ Liven up your meals by sharing food with guests. Invite friends over and try one new recipe per week. Experiment with different food items. Put a little effort into your table and meal presentation.
- ✓ Try a combination of raw and cooked vegetables. Your ideal meal will have a variety of colors, textures, and flavors.
- ✓ Eat healthy snacks such as fruit, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and whole grain breads and cereals.

Diagram 1 BALANCED MEAL PORTIONS*



- ✓ Avoid overcooking your food. Vegetables can be steamed just enough to make them easier to chew. Stir frying is another great method for cooking food lightly.
- ✓ Avoid drinking water during a meal. This dilutes enzymes so they cannot break down foods for proper digestion.
- ✓ Try drinking ginger tea if you need to stimulate your appetite. Cut foods into small pieces and chew slowly.
- ✓ Minimize the amount of sugared drinks (including alcohol), salts, unsaturated fats, and processed foods you eat.

In addition to following a healthy diet, Canada's Food Guide states that people older than the age of 50 should take a daily vitamin D supplement. If you choose to supplement your diet with any vitamins, be sure to note this on your list of medications.

Important Note: Contact your dentist if your teeth or dentures are causing chewing difficulty. Contact your medical doctor if you have a persistent change in appetite or indigestion.

Golden Rules of Health

1. Quit smoking. It's the best thing you can do to have a positive impact on almost every system in your body. Take action to prevent the many chronic diseases caused by tobacco use. It's never too late to reap the benefits of quitting smoking. There are many support services to help you quit so you can live longer and stronger.
2. Drink water whenever you are thirsty between meals. Drinking lots of pure water each day from a spring, a filtered water source, or even a tap can help to keep your cells hydrated. It is the simplest way to improve health and prevent some of the effects of aging. Your wrinkled skin, brittle bones, aching joints, and dry mouth are crying out for "more WATER"!

4. Monitor Your Medications

Keeping yourself physically fit includes being able to manage your medications. You may be one of the substantial numbers of seniors who take multiple medicines daily. Medication for disorders of the heart and circulatory system, digestive system, and respiratory system are commonly used, as are anti-inflammatories, pain relievers, and antidepressants, just to name a few. The more drugs a person takes the greater the chance of experiencing side effects. Caring for yourself properly includes keeping a current record of your medications as well as any other supplements you are taking. Have your medications reviewed from time to time and always verify that any new medications are compatible with what you are already taking.

In order to keep track of your medications, sort them out in advance. Using day-of-the-week or color-coded pillboxes may help you keep track of timing. For example, a yellow daily pillbox left near the

fridge may contain certain medications to be taken in the morning, while having a black daily pillbox left on the kitchen table may contain medications that need to be taken in the afternoon or evening. You can also use labels or stickers with specific written instructions or reminders to help you keep track.

When you do take your medications, be sure to take them as directed. Improper use of medications can cause disorientation, dizziness, and poisoning, all of which put seniors at risk of injury and illness. Some pills are meant to be taken with meals, others without. Some pills are meant to be taken at certain times of the day. It can get confusing trying to keep track, especially with multiple medications, so you need an organizational system that works for you.

I've had patients, young and old who were not wise consumers of their medications. The majority of this group did not have a list recording what they were taking. Some of them said they were only guessing at why the medication needed to be taken. Others were aware of having side effects, but didn't know which medication might be causing them. They had never thought of taking on an active role in their own health care.

Always remember that you play the leading role in your own health-care team that works together to bring you to optimal health and wellness. Have a discussion with your team members regarding the least amount of medications that will provide the best results for your condition. Be informed about what you are taking, why you need it, and how to take it properly. Read the medication pamphlets and let your health-care team know if you are experiencing any side effects. Getting your medications right is a moving and changing target that needs regular monitoring to hit the bullseye.

5. Manage Your Pain

Chronic pain is something many seniors live with. Unfortunately this can become a barrier to aging well if it prevents seniors from getting exercise, socializing, or engaging in a fulfilling lifestyle. This can lead to physical isolation and depression. Chronic pain affects not only our physical body, but our mind and spirit as well. Seniors are among the largest group that suffers from inadequate pain control. They tend to minimize the pain, and are sometimes unable to effectively communicate their symptoms. Their liver and kidney function has decreased, so medications are not processed as effectively. Sadly, sometimes their complaints of pain are dismissed or overlooked.

It is not wise to suffer with pain. Describe the pain to your physician and ask for treatment. Pain management is crucial to achieving your optimal health. Make sure your comments have been heard and are being addressed. Remember, in order to age safely in your home, you need to play the lead role in your health-care team by reporting your symptoms and being active in your own health and wellness treatments.

You may be familiar with the saying “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” This applies particularly well to any chronic pain associated with physical aging. As mentioned earlier, our physical parts wear down as we age and we are not capable of bouncing back from injuries as quickly as we once did. Because of this, we must be extra careful to prevent any painful situations. Getting regular checkups, exercising at a level appropriate for you, eating a well-balanced diet, and drinking plenty of water can significantly prevent or decrease pain.

In order to prevent injuries or aggravating chronic pain, I would advise you to pace yourself. This may be tougher than it sounds if your mindset has not adapted from previous decades and you are still comparing what you could do in the past to what you are capable of doing now. Do yourself a favor and learn to work at a slower pace and rest when you need to. It is better to avoid a painful situation due to overuse than to suffer the consequences. We simply do not “bounce back” as quickly as we used to, so adopt a preventive attitude for managing your pain.

Another significant contributor to pain is stress. If you are already living a healthy lifestyle yet feel there is more you might be able to do to manage your chronic pain, ask yourself, “How am I dealing with the stress in my life?” Fortunately, stress management is a factor that is within our control, and will be discussed in Chapter 3.

When you are in pain it may seem more comfortable to just stay at home. Studies show that people who cut themselves off from their social circles are more likely to become depressed and are less able to manage their illness. Stay involved with your family, friends, and social activities. Be aware of your behavior around managing pain. If you are reducing your social activities because of the pain you are experiencing, be sure to report this to your health-care team because there are solutions.

There are many simple, cost-effective treatments for pain. Arthritis and chronic back pain may be relieved by applying warm packs to the affected area, or soaking hands or feet in warm water. Other conditions

may respond well to postural changes and specific resting positions. Ask your physician or certified-health practitioner about the best home remedies for your condition.

I have been so humbled in my clinical practice to learn from my patients who play an active role in their health, especially with those who are dealing with chronic pain. As I've mentioned before, they have inspired me by constantly adapting to their condition with a positive attitude. They have shown me that some of the simplest pain-management techniques come in the form of drinking plenty of water, keeping warm, pacing themselves, and using the therapies and resting positions that work best for their conditions.

6. Get Quality Sleep

There's a magical, restoring power to sleep! Is that a thing of the past for you? If you are getting less than six hours of sleep per night, you may be experiencing decreased alertness, concentration, or libido. You may become more forgetful, get cravings for sweets and carbohydrates, have dark circles under your eyes, or feel depressed. If so, there are personal adaptations that you can make to help you get a good night's rest on a more consistent basis.

Many elderly people suffer from a variety of disorders that can, and do, disrupt sleep. Among them are arthritis, heartburn, incontinence, gastro-esophageal reflux, cardiovascular disease, and dementia. All of these conditions can interrupt, delay, and/or shorten sleep. Elderly people generally secrete lower amounts of chemicals that regulate the sleep/wake cycle. In addition, reduced exposure to sunlight and a decrease in exercise and mental stimulation, plus a changed diet, may increase sleep difficulties. It may also be difficult to obtain quality sleep at night if you are grieving or taking medications with side effects of insomnia.

Managing sleep patterns can be a real challenge. I've heard my elderly patients say the toughest part for them is avoiding daytime naps or falling asleep in front of the television. My advice for preventing napping is to schedule a walk or another activity just before that time of day. The same can be done to prevent falling asleep in front of the television. Consult your health-care team if none of the following techniques to manage your sleep are effective:

- ✓ Maintain a regular waking and bed time.
- ✓ Decrease or eliminate daytime naps.