

FUN: ENJOY YOURSELF

By Carol Abaya, M.A.

Question: My sister, 78, has always been active in the community and has been a volunteer at the local school tutoring young children in reading for the past five years. She recently had hip replacement surgery and needs to use a walker, but wants to continue tutoring. The family feels she should stay home and relax. How can we convince her that she's done enough for the community?

Answer: You should be encouraging - rather than discouraging - her to continue the tutoring.

At any age, a person should do the things that provide satisfaction and enjoyment. Obviously, your sister enjoys young people and gains much herself from the interaction. Her self-esteem receives a boost as she feels she is being a productive human being. These are very important.

My father did volunteer work every day at his local hospital until he was 88. At 90, my mother who also had hip surgery, was tutoring disadvantaged second graders.

If your sister can no longer drive, find a solution - hire someone or a taxi to take her back and forth to the school.

Question: My father, 81, has had a vegetable garden for many many years. He wants to this year, but his arthritis is getting worse and he can't bend down very easily. We're trying to discourage him. Advice please.

Answer: Encourage, rather than discourage, him. Gardening and the satisfaction gained by seeing plants grow and then eating the really fresh vegetables offers tremendous psychological benefits.

If he can't bend down, have a raised garden built. Then he can easily water the plants and do the weeding.

My father grew up on a farm. The last garden he had was when he was 92. His tomatoes were famous far and wide. In fact, we had vegetables carved into his tombstone.

We need to encourage aging parents to do things they enjoy, and to find ways to help them do so.

Question: My mother is in a nursing home, and her hands tremble a lot from Parkinson's. She has always loved flowers, and the staff is trying to get her interested in gardening. I'm afraid she'll hurt herself. Please advise.

Answer: Congratulations to the nursing home. An excellent example of an activity that can be done by an older person with any number of impairments.

Nurturing flowers help make a person feel needed and gives the person something to look forward to. Gardening can help reduce depression and feelings of loneliness. Even those in wheelchairs can grow flowers.

Bright colors and sweet scents simply make a person feel good.

For those with handicaps, the American Horticultural Therapy Association (at 1-800-634-1603) has marvelous suggestions. They are located at 909 York Street, Denver, CO 80206.

Question: My mother will be 75 soon and wants, as a gift, a weekend at a nearby hotel that has a spa. She wants to relax in the sauna, have a facial and massage, and "drink champagne." We think she's too old for such nonsense. Please advise.

Answer: Your mother is a smart lady and you should be guided by her.

No one is too old to feel good about herself! It's very important that everyone, regardless of age, look forward to and then thoroughly enjoy something positive.

A facial helps revitalize skin - and makes you feel good about yourself. A massage helps stimulate blood circulation and the functioning of key organs.

And drinking champagne and being waited on by others is just fun.

Besides treating your mother to a spa weekend, treat yourself too. You'll return home in a much happier and healthier frame of mind!

Question: My mother, 78, wants to take a cruise with her "boyfriend" who is 76. They are both healthy, but how can we convince them they're too old to go off by themselves?

Answer: If they're healthy and mentally alert, you shouldn't be getting involved in the first place. It's your mother's business.

On the positive side, a ship provides marvelous "protection" for an elder and is far less tiring than other kinds of tours.

Ship staff are usually very solicitous of older people and keep an extra eye on them. There are always doctors and nurses on board, so if your mother or boyfriend get sick, help is immediately available.

Once on board, your mother can relax and doesn't have to worry about unpacking and repacking and meeting another bus or plane. At the same time, off-board sightseeing can be fascinating, and on-board activities keep away boredom.

Encourage - rather than discourage - your mother. The last long trip, which involved a 10 hour plane ride, my father took was at age 84.

Question: My mother, 74, recently moved in with us and has trouble sleeping at night. She watches TV in her room, which then disturbs other members of the family. We all need our sleep. Advice please.

Answer: A new environment, a less active lifestyle, medications, (both prescription and over the counter), a change in diet or eating times can all result in insomnia.

If she is less active than before, seek ways she can increase general activities and exercise.

Review medications and discuss the need with her doctor. You should find a Board Certified geriatric physician and have a thorough medical workup done. Eliminate antihistamines because they often have caffeine. Pain killers may also have caffeine. Reduce or eliminate caffeine, sugar, high fat foods and alcohol, especially at night.

If she wants to watch TV or listen to the radio after other family members are asleep, get her headphones. An automatic turn off (timer) on the TV will turn it off after a couple of hours so she doesn't have to worry about making sure it's off before she falls asleep.

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