

[OPINION/SHORT COMMUNICATION]

Healthy Ageing: A Basic Concept

Hom Nath Chalise, PhD^{1,2}

Corresponding Author & Email

Hom Nath Chalise; chalisehkpp@gmail.com

¹Central Department of Population Studies, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

²Expert Member, WHO (TAG) Advisory Group for Measurement, Monitoring and Evaluation of the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing, WHO, Geneva, Switzerland.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9301-6890>

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Abstract

Rapid population aging is a characteristic of the 21st century, regardless of a nation's level of development. An aging global population results in a burden in medical and social demographic problems worldwide. Addressing this problem is the highest priority for the care of the aging population worldwide. Healthy aging is an individual lived experience that is influenced by healthy behaviours over the course of a lifetime. This includes a person's ability to: meet their basic needs; learn, grow and make decisions; be mobile; build and maintain relationships, and contribute to society. For the promotion of healthy aging, a healthy lifestyle is important. A healthy lifestyle for older adults includes healthy eating, regular physical activity, staying at a healthy weight, improving mental health, social participation, regular health check-ups and health screening, no smoking, and taking

steps to prevent falls.

Keywords: Aging, healthy aging, preventing aging, active aging, Decade of healthy aging

Main Text

In the 20th century, aging was occurring mainly in developed countries and developing countries were less concerned with this. But, now life expectancy in the world is rising despite some regional differences. Rapid population aging is a characteristic of the 21st century, regardless of a nation's level of development (Chalise, 2019). However, an increased life expectancy does not always imply improved health and well-being in the later years of older people. Aging often comes with problems affecting well-being, such as depression, loneliness, and ill health (Chalise, 2021; Attafuah et al., 2022). As a result, as people in the world are aging, the well-being of older adults in the world is increasingly becoming an important issue (Joshi & Chalise, 2021; Chalise et al., 2007).

Aging is a multifaceted process. It involves numerous molecular and cellular mechanisms in the context of different organ systems. A set of functional and structural alterations weaken the immune system. Old age is not a disease but aging is associated with a decline in the immune system and intrinsic capacity (Chalise & Rosenberg, 2020). An aging population impacts almost every area of government policy and presents several socioeconomic and health and care challenges. So, people from the multidisciplinary field are working to find out the ways how people in old age can also have good health and quality of life.

At the biological level, aging results from the impact of the accumulation of a wide variety of molecular and cellular damage over time (Attafuah, et al, 2022). Finally, it results in a gradual decrease in physical and mental capacity, a growing risk of disease, and ultimately death. With increasing age older people may suffer from geriatric syndrome like cognitive impairment, depression, falls, pain, urinary incontinence, dizziness, functional dependence, and others (Chalise & Rosenberg, 2020). It will have a substantial impact on morbidity, disability, and healthcare of older people (Khanal & Chalise, 2020). Older adults are more likely to suffer from chronic medical conditions that increase their risk of developing geriatric syndrome that, in turn, is as prevalent as chronic diseases and the co-occurrence of both can have a significant effect on older adults' functional status and their ability to manage their overall health, let alone the rising costs of care (Inouye, et al., 2007; Lee, 2009). But, having a healthy lifestyle can help people to deal with age-related changes.

An aging global population results in a burden in medical and social demographic problems worldwide (Singh, et al., 2021). Addressing this problem is the highest priority for the care of the aging population worldwide. But, having a healthy lifestyle can help people deal with those changes. It may also prevent some health problems and help individuals to make the most of their life. Some of the benefits of staying active and healthy as people get older include increasing well-being and participation, recovering from illness more quickly, reducing the risk of getting a chronic disease, and preventing falls.

Everyone should have the opportunity to live a long and healthy life. The environment we live in can favour for health or it may be harmful. Environments directly influence to every one's behaviour, such as, exposure to health risks, access to quality health and social care, and the opportunities that aging brings. In simple words, healthy aging is about creating the environments and opportunities

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that enable people to be and do what they value throughout their lives. Everybody can experience healthy aging. For healthy aging being free of disease or infirmity is not a requirement, as many elderly have one or more health conditions that, when well-controlled, have little influence on their well-being (WHO, 2015). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines healthy aging as the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability to enable well-being in older age (WHO, 2015). Functional ability is the actual or potential capacity of an individual person's ability to: meet their basic needs; learn, grow and make decisions; be mobile; build and maintain relationships, and contribute to society (WHO, 2020).

Healthy aging is an individual lived experience. It is influenced by healthy behaviours over the course of a lifetime. For example, nutrition quality, physical activity, access to high-quality healthcare, and social engagement influence healthy behavior. From early in life the intent to age well should be fostered. Further, well-being is the birthright of every human being that incorporates physical, mental, and social health. A common misconception about the healthy aging requirement is the absence of disease or infirmity. But many older people experience one or more health conditions that when well-managed, have little impact on their well-being (WHO, 2002).

According to WHO, Key Principles behind healthy aging are “1. Older people are an intrinsic value to society 2. Evidence indicates that health promotion interventions can extend both length & quality of life 3. It is never too late to promote health, even in very old age 4. Tackling health inequalities should be at the core of any healthy aging strategy 5. Respect autonomy and personal control – involve older people in the design of healthy aging strategies 6. Respect individuality and heterogeneity” (WHO, 2002).

Further, healthy aging refers to the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security, to enhance the quality of life as people age. Active aging, successful aging, productive aging are other terms that is often used interchangeably with “Healthy aging”. Health professionals prefer the term “healthy aging”, because the World Health Organization (WHO) defines “health” as including not only physical and mental health but also social well-being (WHO, 2014). Everybody can experience *Healthy Ageing*. Healthy aging does not mean being free of disease or infirmity as many older adults have one or more health conditions that, when well-controlled, have little influence on their well-being. The benefit of healthy aging is that it helps to reduce the pressure on health care and social services. Older people also make important contributions to their families, their communities, the economy, and their nation. We can learn these things from Japan.

According to WHO, four elements of healthy aging are functional abilities, intrinsic capacities, environments, and well-being (WHO, 2015). WHO further explains: fixed personal characteristics (e.g., gender or ethnicity), social norms (e.g., occupation, education, wealth, or social security), and other factors (e.g., smoking, drinking, deprivation, or air pollution) across our life span can affect later health characteristics. Later health characteristics include physiological risk factors, diseases, injuries, and broader geriatric syndromes.

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The cumulative effects of these health characteristics determine one's intrinsic capacity. Intrinsic capacity and its interaction with the environment determine an individual's functional ability and consequently govern the attainment of well-being (WHO, 2015).

For the promotion of healthy aging, a healthy lifestyle is important. A healthy lifestyle for older adults includes healthy eating, regular physical activity, staying at a healthy weight, improving mental health, social participation, regular health check-ups and health screening, no smoking, and taking steps to prevent falls. Even if people have never done them before, it's never too late to start taking care of their health. Older people, who stay independent, active, and healthy, can continue to contribute their skills, knowledge, and experience to society. Finally, it will positively impact overall socioeconomic and health and care challenges related to older people (Khanal & Chalise, 2020).

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