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After 65

Michigan State University

Cooperative Extension Service

Home and Family Series

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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
Home and Family Series Bulletin 496 November, 1965

By Mrs. Lennah K. Backus

Associate Professor of Home Management and Child Development, Emeritus

IT MAY NOT HAPPEN right on your 65th birthday, but suddenly, one day, you realize that you are one of those older folks that everyone is talking about. In this new role you probably have more time on your hands than ever before. How to plan your time, how to spend these hours, confront you as well as every older person.

There are those in the later years who manage their time easily and well. These seem to be the people who enjoy fairly good health, who have enough money for comforts and some luxuries, and who have a sufficient number of contacts and interests to make life worthwhile. Lacking health or money or persons who are meaningful in your life can be a serious handicap. If, as an older person, you have more than your share of such problems you may want to discuss them with a relative, another person in whom you have confidence, a professional person, such as your physician or church counselor.

Perhaps none of the suggestions you receive will fit perfectly into your plan or needs. Likewise, the ideas discussed in this folder will not apply equally to everyone. They are general guidelines. They are intended to help give perspective to the view of life that lies ahead.

Managing Your Time

As an older person you have probably been getting plenty of advice—join a club, get a job, travel, move to a warmer climate, find a hobby. Some or all of these activities may be good for some people after 65, but you will need to select the ones that will give you the kind of later life that is *just right for you*.

If you never were a "joiner," chances are that join-

ing several clubs will not be the answer; if you never enjoyed working with your hands it is unlikely that crafts will greatly challenge you; likewise travel, even though you can afford it, may not be for you. Of course you should be willing to try new things; otherwise you may never know what you are missing.

If you find that you have too much time on your hands, or if you are one of the newly retired, you might try a daily or weekly time schedule. Many people have found it helpful to set aside certain hours in the day which they will spend in a particular way. A typical schedule might include some of the following:

Attend church

Invite some one for a meal

Call up a friend or go visiting

Go sight-seeing in your own town

Spend the afternoon in the library

Go shopping

Bake a cake for the family next door

Baby-sit with the grandchildren

Spend time on your wardrobe

Attend the Thursday Study Club

Some of these will not appeal to you and some will not be possible for you. But the idea is to lay out a schedule for yourself in some detail at least for a time until you are convinced of the value of planning ahead. Laying out a schedule for yourself will avoid an aimless sort of existence, provide for some variety, and give you something to look forward to.

Take Stock of Yourself

If your life has been so full that you have been unable to expand your interests, in older age you might start with a bit of personal inventory. To get started, ask yourself these four questions:

1. What sort of activities did I enjoy in my youth?
2. Which of these pleasures did I put aside because of the demands of my family or job?

3. What in my regular job did I find most satisfying?
4. What sort of interests or activities have I often thought I would like to know more about?

Continue your inventory with the following suggestions:

Try to achieve some balance in the total use of your time; that is, include both quiet and active pursuits, spend some time with groups and some time by yourself; do for others as well as taking care of yourself. Do not "put all your eggs in one basket," is a good rule to follow in planning your time.

Go for a daily walk if your health permits.

Develop hobbies that demand mental and some physical effort. By all means, continue such a hobby if you already have one and still enjoy it.

Widen your interests to include not only some of the more usual pursuits, such as reading, music, arts and crafts, but be receptive to new ideas. Add to your knowledge about the heavens, the seas, other countries or current events, or any subject that interests you.

Take time to enjoy the commonplace; watch a sunset, a bubbling stream, a child at play. Such observations help develop inner resources and add to personal enjoyment that can be carried on independent of the people one associates with.

If possible, plan to attend some group meeting regularly, church, civic meetings, concerts, or other forms of entertainment.

Seek out useful work or at least plan to carry on certain daily chores.

Do not depend too much on your family to fill your time or to plan your time for you. Involve yourself in some pursuits which demand your complete attention and which will sustain you over a period of time.

So far as you are able, prove that you are an asset to society by assuming some responsibility for yourself, for others, and for your community.

Keeping Physically Fit

It is so much easier to manage your time satisfactorily if you enjoy fairly good health. To be sure, you can not choose the kind of physical structure which you possess, nor can you trade the old model in on a new one but you can try to keep what you have in good running order. Maintaining health at as high a level as possible is worthy of one's best efforts.

1. Your general health

Too many people avoid a trip to the doctor for fear of hearing the worst. Choose a doctor in whom you have confidence and then plan to follow his advice. Even if you are feeling good, make regular trips to the doctor. You may find out that there was no basis for your fears. Moreover, if spotted early, certain types of disease can be more easily treated and controlled, if not actually cured. Your doctor will advise you as to treatment, diet, rest, and exercise that is right for

you. His reassurance will help you to know which aches and pains you must learn to live with and which should be given immediate attention.

Even though you manage to escape serious illness, you may encounter certain physical handicaps that can be quite troublesome. Older people often find that they do not hear as well, see as well, or move around as steadily. In many cases some improvement can be made.

2. Your hearing

If it is hearing loss that you experience, check with your physician. Hearing aids frequently help. If examination shows that you have a hearing loss, be sure to have a hearing aid evaluation in a reputable non-commercial clinic. If you buy a hearing aid, plan to wear it even though getting used to it may be difficult. Avoid any feeling of embarrassment knowing that you are approaching your problem in a sensible way. If a hearing aid will not help, you might want to try lip reading. There are many people today with no hearing impairment who have taken up the study of lip reading both as a precautionary measure and as an interesting activity. Instructional materials and teachers are available to those who desire to learn. For further information, contact:

Speech and Hearing Clinic—Department of Speech
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan

or

Michigan Association for Better Hearing
724 Abbott Road
East Lansing, Michigan

3. Your eyesight

If your eyesight is not as good as it used to be, first check to see how long it has been since you have had an eye examination. You may need a change of glasses. Or you may be reading where the light is very poor. The quality and quantity of light is an important factor. Your Home Service people with the utility companies might be a source of information. Better lighting can improve matters considerably. In the case of serious loss of vision, there is the possibility of studying Braille. As in the case of lip-reading, old and young alike are finding the study of Braille most challenging. Materials and personnel to help in this area have increased considerably.

For further information contact:

Services for the Blind
Department of Social Welfare
Lewis Cass Building
Lansing, Michigan

or contact your County Bureau of Social Aid, Services for the Blind.

4. Rest

Older people sometimes become concerned over loss of energy and the need for more sleep. There is nothing alarming about resting and sleeping to the extent

that your body requires. One word of caution—be sure that you are not sleeping for lack of something more interesting to do. The opposite is sometimes true — the complaint that you sleep very little at night. Since people vary as to the sleep that they require, the amount of sleep is not as important as what you do about it. Plan to use the extra hours when you cannot sleep in writing letters, in reading, or in some constructive way. This is better than letting it upset you.

5. Physical exercise

Most older people can profit by some physical exercise — at least enough to bring about a pleasant sense of bodily fatigue. In general, a gradual cutting down in the amount and kind of exercise is recommended rather than any sudden change in your activity. Consult your doctor as to the degree of exercise that is healthy for you.

6. Meal-time

Inform yourself as to your food requirements and plan a varied diet. Check your mealtime routine. Appetites can become dulled if your menu lacks interest or if you must eat alone too much of the time. Do not allow mealtime to settle into a rut. Spend more time in preparation and in experimenting with new recipes. Men often become interested in the subject of nutrition. They gain skill in the preparing and buying of food, all of which adds to meal-time enjoyment.

In a nutshell

Poor health or discomfort often leads to a depressed feeling in which it is difficult to be cheerful and forward-looking. Say to yourself, "What can be improved rather than just endured?" Sometimes a change in our attitude toward our disability is the one improvement that can be made.

Improving Your Relations With Others

Feeling a part of a family, or feeling that someone cares, is essential to life as an older person. Fortunately, many older and younger families do enjoy their associations together. Recognizing the differences between the generations and knowing that problems can arise on either side, all must show a willingness to work for harmony when difficulties arise. As far as you are able, try to take the initiative in creating the kind of climate in the family in which family participation can proceed agreeably and productively. As an older person you will be less apt to encounter problems with the family and with others if you observe the following:

1. Improve your conversation

Think more about how much of the time you do the talking and how much you are willing to listen. Be a good listener.

Make sure that what you talk about is really interesting to others. You may lose your audience if

you dwell too much on the past or the dismal. Be cheerful!

Watch to see that you are not retelling events that the family has heard many times before. Use discretion in how you share your often unique life experiences with the younger generation. Don't be a bore!

An occasional question to your listeners will redirect the conversation. Show curiosity!

2. Refrain from a tendency to dominate others

The plain truth is that in the later years the people who will need or want our direction will be few. Sometimes it is difficult to stop being the person who gives direction on the job or within the family—to stop being the one who always knows best. But stop we must.

Attempting to maintain control over younger families is not in their best interests or your own. Young people will resist strong opinions continually forced upon them. Even though some control may seem urgent, it is no longer your role to exercise control over younger members of the family. This is not to suggest that older people should or can cease to think or form opinions.

Older age should be a time for considering all sides of a question, for weighing opinions against the changing times.

There are many older people whose opinions and judgments are sought. These seem to be the people who have been willing to give up authority through the years. They have much to offer out of their experience, but it should be offered when asked; it should not be forced out of the need to feel useful or the need to hold onto others.

When thinking about how or when to ease off from any position of authority, ask yourself: Is the younger person able to get along without my advice?

3. Avoid self-pity like the plague

You may have plenty of reason to feel sorry for yourself in older age, but do not continually unburden yourself on others. Sympathetic as others may try to be, there is a limit to their understanding and patience.

You do have a choice—either to complain about all your ills or decide to keep some of them to yourself. The latter is much easier on the family. Of course there will be times when you will want to share your worries with someone but this is quite different than complaining all the time.

If you are not always complaining you will likely receive greater consideration at the time when you need it most.

4. Display generosity

Interest and affection for others is often best conveyed through giving of your time or talents. You may be able to bestow a money gift at a time when it will be most appreciated. Or you may be able to

care for the grandchildren occasionally or at least in case of an emergency. Be willing to give up some of your time when needed. Only you can determine how much energy you can devote to helping out. At times you may have to refuse no matter how much you would like to help.

Be generous too in your praise of others by remembering to compliment them for their successes as well as expressing gratitude for favors shown.

5. Seek new friends, restore old ones

Seek new friends since old friends become less numerous as the years roll along. Make an effort to contact persons by telephone, a letter, or by a visit. They, like you, may be in need of companionship. Showing real interest in others is one way of promoting friendships. Studies show that older people turn first to their children and secondly to relatives of their own generation for comfort and companionship. Through the years, brothers, sisters, or cousins may drift apart. They have gradually lost the means of communication and lack common points of interest. Former ties can be restored if someone is willing to make the first contact.

Above all, do not become suspicious of the motives of others, feeling that they have lost interest in you and no longer care. You may be creating a barrier between you that really has no basis.

Seeing Yourself As A Person

Before you can hope to live a full life after 65, you will need to take a look at yourself. How do you see yourself as a person?

Mrs. Brown, age 65, sees herself as too old to learn and no longer useful. She illustrates one way of looking at one's self. Mrs. Jones, age 65, gives us quite another picture. She sees herself as able for the first time to engage in many new and exciting experiences and to have more time to be of service to others.

Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Jones have quite different views about older age and about their worth as an older person. No doubt these differences could be traced to different experiences they have had throughout life. Ideally, we need to build self-esteem in childhood, bolster it through the years, and give it a boost in the later years. How can you build or maintain your self-esteem as an older person?

1. Take a new look at responsibility

It is true that in older age when many of the experiences and responsibilities of a busy life time are cut off, one's self-respect may take a sudden drop. One way to avoid feeling let down is to view the cutting off of responsibilities as relief from work and worry. Be willing to let go of some responsibilities so that you will be free to assume new ones of your choosing. You are likely to find the new responsibilities more rewarding.

2. Set your record straight

Another way to boost your self-respect is to take stock of what you have already accomplished in your life. Your skills and your contributions may be many. This knowledge should renew your faith in yourself and give you some incentive for your life ahead. Be generous and realistic with yourself. Don't sell yourself short as a person. Try to build on the talents which you possess.

3. Keep on learning

Do you feel that you are too old to learn? Learning ability in the later years is only slightly below its peak in life and many older people are finding that they can learn new things. You probably have a lot of catching up to do in many subjects that you always thought you would like to know more about. Now is the time to inquire into some of these areas. You may learn more slowly than you did in your younger years but some factors such as vocabulary and word usage have developed to a greater extent. Stretch your mind occasionally with ideas that seem beyond you. Do not allow yourself to become mentally lazy.

4. Give your memory a little help

Are you disturbed about loss of memory — the feeling that you must be getting old? This concern may not be as serious as you think. All people forget things at times. If this troubles you, give your memory a little help by writing down the things that you *must* remember. Through the years you have accumulated a greater store of things to remember and it is not necessary that you be able to recall everything. Above all, don't become alarmed if you forget something. In time it may all come back.

5. Look your best

Of course, there are those who have an unrealistic picture of themselves as an older person. They try to deny old age and either dress or act in ways unbecoming to their years. They seem to say, "I refuse to admit even to myself that I am growing old." Older age can present its own distinctive beauty and charm if one is willing to face facts and try to discover how to look one's best.

Through extra time spent in grooming and by selecting appropriate clothes, we can add something to our appearance that nature may have taken away. It may take a little more time and effort. With fewer social pressures in which we may have dressed to please others now we can dress to please ourselves and for our own comfort and satisfaction. It is surprising how a new outfit or a change of clothing can affect how you feel about yourself.

Remember that what you think of yourself is reflected in what you are able to do and what others expect of you. In this, personal appearance plays a part. Unless we are aware of our feelings toward life

in general, we may look disagreeable and crochety even when well groomed.

6. Develop your philosophy of life

What you think of yourself as a person is importantly tied up with what you hold to be the real meaning of life both now and at the end of life. Now you have more time to contemplate and ponder values by which you have lived and your relation to your fellow man and to the whole universe. In this searching for a philosophy by which you can live, it is understandable that many older people turn to the

church for guidance in this area. It is essential to discover for oneself the unique and special purpose of his own life in order to live fully, confidently, and serenely in the years after 65.

Are You Older Than Your Age?

Below is a check list to help you find out. Do you find yourself behaving more this way than you used to? If your answer is "yes" to any of these items it will give you a clue as to some ways you can improve in order to age more successfully.

Do you:	Not at all	Some	Quite a bit
1. Complain more than you used to?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Resist change?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Resent criticism?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Think more about yourself than you do of other people and their needs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Talk more about yourself than you used to?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Criticize the modern generation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Make less effort to keep old friends or make new ones?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Feel sorry for yourself, feel that life has passed you by?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Feel that you have nothing to look forward to?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Shy away from community responsibilities with the excuse, "Let a younger person do it"?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Show less interest in your clothing and appearance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Do you smile?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

