



Cover Page



ENHANCING QUALITY OF LIFE: ESSENTIAL HEALTH TIPS FOR INDIAN ELDERS

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Abstract

Enhancing the quality of life among Indian elders has become an important concern due to the growing aging population and changing lifestyles. Elderly individuals often face physical, mental, emotional, and social challenges that affect their overall well-being. This study focuses on essential health tips that can help Indian elders maintain a healthy and active lifestyle. Proper nutrition, regular physical exercise, adequate sleep, stress management, and routine medical checkups play a significant role in promoting healthy aging. The study also highlights the importance of mental wellness, social interaction, and emotional support in improving the quality of life among older adults. In addition, practices such as yoga, meditation, and healthy daily habits contribute to physical fitness and inner peace. The findings emphasize that adopting healthy lifestyle practices can help Indian elders achieve better health, independence, happiness, and overall well-being in later life.

Key Words: Indian elders, Quality of life, Health tips, Physical exercise, Mental wellness

INTRODUCTION

Enhancing the quality of life among Indian elders has become an important social and health concern due to the growing aging population in India. Aging is a natural process that brings several physical, mental, emotional, and social changes in an individual's life. Many elderly people experience health-related problems such as weakness, chronic diseases, stress, loneliness, and emotional insecurity, which may affect their overall well-being. Therefore, maintaining a healthy lifestyle and ensuring proper care for elders is essential for promoting healthy and active aging. Healthy lifestyle practices play a major role in improving the quality of life among Indian elders. Balanced nutrition, regular physical exercise, proper sleep, personal hygiene, and routine medical checkups help older adults maintain physical fitness and prevent various age-related diseases. Activities such as walking, yoga, meditation, and light exercises improve flexibility, strength, and energy levels. Healthy habits also help elders remain independent and active in their daily lives. Thus, understanding the importance of healthy lifestyle practices is essential for ensuring better health and well-being among elderly individuals.

In addition to physical health, mental and emotional well-being are equally important for healthy aging. Many elders face emotional challenges such as loneliness, anxiety, depression, and lack of social support. Positive mental health helps elderly individuals cope with stress, maintain emotional balance, and enjoy life with confidence and happiness. Social interaction, family support, community participation, and relaxation practices contribute significantly to emotional stability and mental peace. Therefore, understanding the impact of physical, mental, and emotional well-being is necessary for promoting healthy aging among Indian elders. Another important aspect of this study is to create awareness about essential health tips for enhancing the quality of life of Indian elders. Many elderly individuals and their families are unaware of the importance of preventive healthcare, balanced diets, stress management, and regular health monitoring. Spreading awareness through education, healthcare programs, and social initiatives can encourage elders to adopt healthy lifestyle practices and improve their overall quality of life.

OBJECTIVE

- To examine the importance of healthy lifestyle practices among Indian Elders
- To understand the impact of physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing on healthy aging
- To create awareness about essential health tips for enhancing the quality of life of Indian Elders



Cover Page



METHODOLOGY

This study is based on the analysis of secondary data published in various journals, annual reports, and websites. Descriptive research includes surveys and fact-finding inquiries of different kinds. The primary purpose of descriptive research is to describe the situation as it exists at present. The researcher used secondary data to develop an understanding of the pivotal role in the current issue of Enhancing quality of life: essential health tips for Indian elders.

SPECIAL HEALTH AND NUTRITION CARE

Weakness or poor health: Aches, Joint Pains, Bones prone to easy fracture, digestive disorders, heart diseases, diabetes, decreased immunity, mental disorders result in reduced absorption of food, difficulty to cook and feed and take care of themselves.

Ongoing Medication: Change in taste, makes mouth dry, reduces appetite.

Reduced Income: less money to buy food or access health care.

Decreased sense of smell and taste: Weak vision, reduced hearing and smell, poor oral and dental health; problem in chewing or swallowing food.

Loneliness: Living alone, reduced mobility, neglect and abuse decreased appetite.

Dietary needs change with aging in several ways:

- People become less active, their metabolism slows, their energy requirement decreases, all of which mean that they need to eat less.
- Recent research demonstrates that because older adults' abilities to absorb and utilize many nutrients become less efficient, their nutrient requirements actually increase.
- Chronic conditions and medications can affect nutrition requirements. For example, in addition to drug-nutrient interactions affecting drug metabolism, some drug nutrient interactions are also nutrient wasting. This is especially true of the B vitamins.
- Maintaining a nutrient-dense diet is critically important for older adults because of the impact of food intake on health. Years of research have demonstrated that diet quality has a huge effect on physical condition, cognitive condition, bone health, eye health, vascular function, and the immune system. Yet, this can be challenging to achieve for several reasons:
- Aging is often accompanied by a loss of appetite and changes in taste and smell, all of which can lead to more limited food choices and lower intake of healthful foods.
- Aging is also often accompanied by general oral health decline and a reduced ability to swallow, which can affect food choice and intake.
- Many older adults experience mobility constraints, which make it difficult to shop for food, lift heavy jars, open containers, etc.
- Low income is prevalent in aging populations, making it difficult for many older adults to access high quality foods also.

Initiate brainstorming on the foods taken and rejected by the elderly and reasons for denial. Keep in mind that older people have limitations in their dietary choices owing to factors discussed earlier and therefore some do's and don'ts need to be kept in mind.

Do's	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Consume a well-balanced protein rich diet. ➤ Include variety of fruits and vegetables in your diet (red, yellow and green coloured). ➤ Foods to be well cooked in soft, semisolid, easily chewable form. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Avoid pulses and other food items which cause flatulence (Black gram dal, Rajma etc). ➤ Avoid excess salty, sugar, spicy, fried, fatty foods. ➤ Avoid excess coffee, tea, and carbonated drinks



Cover Page



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ It is better to have familiar foods rather than new foods. ➤ Have small, light and frequent meals. ➤ Drink plenty of fluids. 	
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Initiate a discussion to cull out information among the participants what are the preferred foods for elderly at their houses and why? Give them dietary suggestions to overcome health and nutrition problems during old age. These are some of the common problems that older people experience and taking care of diet plays an important role in managing these problems.

Dietary suggestions to overcome health and nutrition problems associate with age

- Overcome weakness-Increase protein rich foods such as dairy, nuts, legumes, eggs, meat.
- Improve bone health, avoid joint pains-Include Calcium and vitamin D rich foods like milk, paneer, fish, sea foods, ragi etc. Spend adequate time in the sun.
- Improve digestion-Increase fibre (whole grains, brown rice, banana stem, beans, fruits, greens and vegetables) and water intake
- Improve health of the heart-Intake of balanced diet, limited intake of oily and fried foods.
- Manage Diabetes-Reduce intake of sugar and sugary foods (mango, litchi, rice, potatoes, sweets, etc) and increase fibre intake
- Increase immunity-Increased intake of green leafy vegetables, citrus fruits and nuts.

Importance of healthy eating for elders

- ❖ Elders are more susceptible to malnutrition. It will happen for a few reasons such as
- ❖ Slowed down metabolism with age.
- ❖ Decreased appetite with age.
- ❖ Decrease appetite will lead to less caloric intake means minimum opportunity for nutrients.
- ❖ Decreased nutrient absorption capacity of the body.

Individuals with primary disabilities often experience “secondary conditions” additional physical and psychological problems that limit a person’s enjoyment of life and participation in activities. Nutrition and Diet in Persons with Disabilities (PWD) affects many of their secondary conditions, such as fatigue, weight problems, and constipation or diarrhoea. Proper nutrition can increase these individuals’ quality of life by improving existing secondary conditions and preventing development of additional conditions. Therefore, it is important that these people are motivated and supported to have the right kind of food.

There are certain minimum standards of care for Persons with Disabilities (PWD) such as

1. Provide health-promoting foods.
2. Provide information, knowledgeable encouragement, and positive social/ instrumental support (assist in grocery shopping, cooking, etc.) to help individuals make good food choices.
3. Support participation in activities that encourage healthy eating and physical activity.
4. Have diet that is safe and nutritionally adequate based on their age, gender and level of activity; that is the foundation for quality nutrition;
5. Have diet that addresses his or her special needs in nutrition, the dietary modifications prescribed by a nutrition professional to address any special needs.
6. Are encouraged to eat recommended portions of healthy foods associated with lower risk for common chronic diseases and conditions, an investment for a long and healthy life

LIFESTYLE MANAGEMENT FOR THE ELDERLY

- ❖ Adopt a healthy lifestyle – this can be done by intake of a balanced diet, regular exercise, staying happy, and stress free and sleeping well.
- ❖ Go for regular health check-ups – as advised by the doctor



Cover Page



- ❖ Adopt stress management techniques such as meditation and yoga
- ❖ Do not self-medicate, consult a doctor for your problems
- ❖ Avoid smoking, consumption of alcohol, tobacco chewing, betel leaves.
- ❖ Socialize and be part of community groups, attend events of your interest (weekly markets/haats, chaupals, religious activities, etc.). Interacting with people keeps one active and a good frame of mind.

SUPPORT AND SERVICES FOR THE ELDERLY

- Improvement in health care facilities over the years has led to a steady rise in the population of senior citizens in India. Ensuring that they lead a secure, dignified and productive life is a challenge and older persons face problems in the absence of adequate social security. Thus, there is a need to provide for the economic and health needs and to create a social milieu, which is conducive and sensitive to the emotional needs of the elderly.
- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has taken cognizance of these issues and a number of schemes and services are now available for the elderly. One such scheme is Livelihood and Skilling.
- Initiatives for Senior Citizens - To provide them ways and means for achieving right to happy, healthy and dignified ageing through financial independence. Two programmes fall under this scheme:
- Senior Able Citizens for Re-Employment in Dignity (SACRED)-Many senior citizens have experience, time and energy which can be used by the business enterprises looking for stable employees. The Human resources cells of many private enterprises seek experienced but stable persons in certain positions.
- Action Groups Aimed at Social Reconstruction (AGRASR Groups): The senior citizens/elderly are encouraged to form Self-Help Groups, which will provide them with a platform to share the time constructively with each other. To attain financial assistance under the scheme SHGs function as AGRASR Groups.
- Moreover, there are other available national schemes for elderly people. Knowledge on these factors will help the facilitator to help the SHG members and their families to take appropriate steps to avail benefits of the available schemes. Divide the group into two and name them as Health Care team and Financial/Livelihood Care team. Discuss the below individual schemes.

COMMON ILLNESSES IN ELDERLY

Common conditions in older age include hearing loss, blurred vision/ difficulty in reading, back and neck pain, diabetes, depression, and dementia. Furthermore, as people age, they are more likely to experience several conditions at the same time.

Eye Problems:

- Elderly people often start having issues with their eyesight as their age progresses. However, it is not necessary that every elderly would have weakened eyesight.
- It needs to be kept in mind that elderly with diabetes may be at the risk of developing weakened eyesight.
- Eyesight for near vision improves and distance vision weakens
- Blurred/weakened vision can limit mobility of elderly, affect interpersonal interactions. It may be a trigger for depression. It often becomes a barrier to accessing information, increases the risk of falls and accidents, and makes driving dangerous.
- Uncontrolled diabetes and increased blood pressure can lead to issues related to eyesight.

ISSUES WITH HEARING

- As a part of ageing, people may start gradually losing their hearing.
- Many of the elderly could complain about not being able to hear clearly and ask the other person to speak loudly.
- This condition could also bring a lot of irritation to the elderly as well as others around them.
- Untreated hearing loss affects communication and thus may also contribute to social isolation and loss of autonomy.
- Inability to hear properly is often associated with anxiety, depression.
- This may not be understood quickly by the family members and also could be seen as elderly person "being slow".



Cover Page



FALLS AND FRACTURES

- ❖ Elderly people are often at risk of falling.
- ❖ Multiple factors like difficulties with vision, balance and mobility, slippery flooring, dim lighting, obstacles, poor stairway design, uneven streets and footpaths, improper use of assistive devices, inappropriate footwear may put elderly individuals at increased risk of falls.
- ❖ Falling may cause fractures of bone easily for the elderly since bones grow weaker with ageing.
- ❖ Caregivers should be advised to accompany elderly while walking, going for bathing, toilet etc.
- ❖ They should also be informed about assistive devices like walking stick, walker etc.
- ❖ The family should also be facilitated for getting assistive devices through the health and wellness centre.
- ❖ If there is any recent fall that has caused a wound or a bruise, you should notify the CHO. You should also help the MPW(F) in nursing of the wound if any.
- ❖ Falls are multifactorial. This may be due to individual-level and environmental factors
- ❖ Environmental factors include:
 - Slippery bathroom
 - Unsafe floor/staircase ∅ Poor lighting
 - Unsafe kitchen
 - Inappropriate use of walkers & crutches
- ❖ Individual-level factors include:
 - Acute illness ∅ lower limb muscle weakness
 - Medications like sedatives etc
 - Foot problems
 - Problems in vision and hearing.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

As age advances in, elderly their routine is disturbed and may experience the following psychological problems:

- ✓ Forgetfulness
- ✓ Dementia (loss of memory)
- ✓ Depression
- ✓ Age related memory loss
- ✓ Sleep disturbances
- ✓ Mood swings etc

ASHA should notify CHO if any of the following signs and symptoms are observed or if informed by the first care giver:

- ✓ Withdrawal from social activities
- ✓ Lack/ excessive sleep
- ✓ Feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness
- ✓ Loss of interest in pleasurable things
- ✓ Loss of interest in food intake
- ✓ Increased confusion
- ✓ Neglecting personal care (grooming, bathing, clothing)
- ✓ Frequent incidents of irritation and agitation leading to anger outburst

ORAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

1. Elderly often practice traditional methods of cleaning of teeth which may be inadequate to maintain oral hygiene.
2. Diseases of other parts of the body may also lead to increased risk of oral disease.
3. Adverse side effects of some treatment may also lead to dry mouth, altered sense of taste and smell.
4. Poor oral health results in impaired nutritional status and general health, reduced self-esteem, wellbeing and quality of life
5. ASHA should notify CHO if any of the following signs and symptoms are observed or as informed by the first care giver:



Cover Page



- Dry mouth
- Tooth pain
- Tooth infection
- Discoloration of tooth
- Swelling/infection of gums
- Bleeding of gums
- Inability to open mouth

HYPERTENSION

- High Blood Pressure, also known as ‘silent killer’ remains silent and undetected unless specifically checked among the elderly.
- Normal range of Blood Pressure among the elderly is 140/90 mm of Hg.
- If undetected, high blood pressure may damage the heart, brain, kidneys and blood vessels

ASHA should notify CHO if any of the following signs and symptoms are observed or if informed by the first care giver:

- ❖ Complaints of headache
- ❖ Increased attacks of sweating, headache and palpitations
- ❖ Breathlessness
- ❖ Bleeding from nose

DIABETES

- Similar to hypertension, diabetes is also termed as ‘silent killer’ which gets detected only when it is specifically checked.
- Diabetes can also lead to complications like heart attack or stroke

ASHA should notify CHO if any of the following signs and symptoms are observed or as informed by the first care giver:

- ❖ Frequent urination
- ❖ Increased hunger
- ❖ Excessive thirst
- ❖ Unexplained weight loss
- ❖ Lack of energy
- ❖ Extreme tiredness
- ❖ Lack of interest
- ❖ Lack of concentration
- ❖ Blurred vision
- ❖ Repeated or severe infection like vaginal infections
- ❖ Slow healing of wounds

SELF CARE

Self-Care and Its Role in Elderly Care

Self-care is one of the best health promotion strategies which means practicing care by the individual himself.

Self-care Practices include the following:

1. Personal hygiene
2. Basic body care
3. Healthy lifestyle

1. Personal hygiene

Personal cleanliness not only protects from infections but also gives dignity and self-esteem. Many of these practices are acquired right from the childhood and others are picked up as the life goes on.

These include:

- ❖ Regular teeth brushing
- ❖ Bathing, changing clothes, frequent hand washing, combing hairs and caring for the nails and feet etc



Cover Page



SAFE HOME ENVIRONMENT

- ❖ Adequate lighting in the house
- ❖ Guards or side rails should be present at bed, window, stairways and bathroom
- ❖ Non slippery floor in bathroom
- ❖ Colouring of house should be helpful in defining doors, stairs etc.
- ❖ Floor should not be very smooth, floor coverings are preferred
- ❖ Furniture should be comfortable and sturdy to allow weight
- ❖ Noise should be controlled
- ❖ Proper cleanliness should be maintained
- ❖ Electric appliances should be shocking proof
- ❖ Home should be free from pests
- ❖ Drugs, pesticides, insecticides etc. should be kept in isolation.
- ❖ Use of call bells

Key tasks of ASHAs for elderly care

1. **Identifying and listing the elderly in the village:** As an ASHA, one of your activities is to undertake line listing of households in your village and are therefore aware about how many elderly individuals are there in the village. For elderly care, it is necessary to know how many elderly persons currently bed-bound, restricted and mobile. Thus, the identification and listing is an important task. This will also help you to know which household to visit while following up. Mobile elderly and their caregiver should be encouraged to visit health and wellness centres for care seeking.
2. **Awareness generation:** One of your key functions would be to create awareness in the community regarding various aspects of elderly care. You can utilise community platforms like VHSNC/MAS to create awareness about healthy ageing. Apart from sensitizing the community towards the various needs of the elderly, you will also address issues like ways to reduce risk of falls in the elderly, malnutrition in elderly individuals and neglect of care in elderly through advice for geriatric friendly home settings. You can also sensitize caregivers to identify common problems among the elderly and orient them to home-based care.
3. **Mobilization of Elderly Support groups ‘Sanjeevini’:** Similar to the NCD support groups, Elderly support groups and Elderly Caregiver support groups may also be created to facilitate the goal of achieving healthy ageing in the population. The Elderly support groups will promote social inclusion and the Caregiver support groups would support each other in taking care of the elderly at home. As an ASHA you should try and get at least 2-3 members to get together and talk about goals of the group.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that healthy lifestyle practices play a vital role in improving the quality of life among Indian elders. Habits such as balanced nutrition, regular exercise, proper sleep, routine medical checkups, and stress management help elderly individuals maintain physical fitness and prevent age-related health problems. These practices support healthy and active aging. The findings also highlight the importance of physical, mental, and emotional well-being in promoting a healthy lifestyle among elders. Emotional stability, positive thinking, social support, and mental peace contribute significantly to overall happiness and life satisfaction. Activities such as yoga, meditation, and social interaction help reduce stress, loneliness, and anxiety among older adults. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the need to create awareness about essential health tips for Indian elders. Promoting healthy living practices through education and healthcare programs can help elders lead healthier, happier, more independent, and dignified lives.



Cover Page



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