

AGEING GRACEFULLY

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A Holistic Guide to Later Life

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AEON

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INTRODUCTION

The idea for writing this book was to investigate ageing as I am approaching my 70th year. Having been involved in natural medicine all my adult life, my health is good, but how could I ensure it stayed that way? I am sure we all have a dread of ending up as that person drooling in a chair, staring vacantly and unknowingly out into a room full of similar empty bodies. I wanted to investigate how I could minimise the risk of that happening to me.

It has been a fascinating journey looking at the latest research into ageing, there is loads, and investigating other things like happiness, fun, and kindness as well as the more predictable diet, lifestyle, etc.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I looks at the fundamentals of staying healthy. These apply to any age but are especially important because as we grow older, our bodies can become less resilient and the effects of a lifetime's habits may begin to show up in the body.

Chapter 1, Nourishment, talks about food, eating habits, and staying healthy. Some of the ideas I discuss may surprise, while others will be more familiar. I start with nourishment as the food we eat is the building block of both health and disease. The choice is ours. Changing your diet at any age can have dramatic results; it really is never too late to change.

The second chapter is Rest. Sleep can become an issue as we age, so in this chapter I talk about the importance of sleep in our bodies, and how sleep is an active state where the body repairs itself and prepares our brain for the next day. There is lots we can do to achieve a good, restful sleep.

Chapter 3, Stretch, discusses the importance of exercise as we grow older. Our bodies are designed to move, and move we must if we wish to stay healthy, bright, and happy. Exercise doesn't have to be the sweaty experience we had when we were younger; there are lots of ways to get moving that are pleasurable.

Chapter 4, Thinking, discusses the science (as we know it to date) of the brain. Dementia is a big issue as we age, but there are many things we can do to keep our minds well-exercised and healthy.

I discuss Happiness in Chapter 5. Happiness is one of the major factors which determine how we age, our longevity, and health. As we grow older, our moods may dip as we lose loved ones, retire, or feel our life has changed in ways we cannot control. Cultivating happiness is an art we can all practice.

Chapter 6 is Connection. Our social relationships are a major factor in healthy old age. Indeed, research among the most long-lived populations showed that having a close-knit group around you brings extraordinary benefits. Our society has become more solitary, and we may well have lost friends and family members and experience, perhaps for the first time, loneliness and isolation. As we age, our interests change; this gives us an opportunity to make new connections and prioritise socialising as well as starting those things 'we always meant to do'.

Chapter 7, Fun, discusses things we can do for pleasure. Fun is very important as we grow older, but our sense of what fun is, of course, changes. There was a meme I saw that sums this up, 'when we were teenagers, we snuck out of the house to go to parties. When we get older, we sneak out of parties

to go home'. This chapter looks at ways to have fun and why pleasure keeps us healthy and happy.

Chapter 8, 'Checking out', discusses death and dying. Life, as the cliché goes, is a terminal condition. Death does not have to be a negative experience; it is as natural as birth. In this chapter, I discuss many ways to manage death as a powerful, healing experience rather than a terrifying prospect.

Part II is the practical part of the book, where we can act on what we have learnt in Part I. I have organised it this way as I find it annoying when I can't find some resource mentioned in a chapter without reading all the way through the chapter again.

Part II also contains a herbal Materia Medica, which lists the herbs mentioned and gives some of my favourite recipes for herbal delights. 'Natural quick fixes' go through a number of common conditions, and their remedies.

I hope *Ageing Gracefully* will be an inspiring, informative, and thought-provoking guide to approach our later years.

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