

# SOURCE LINES

## SUCCESSFUL AGING AND FRIENDSHIPS

*"Do not save your loving speeches for your friends till they are dead. Do not write them on the tombstones. Speak them rather now instead."*

-Anna Cummins

### #1 Tip for successful aging.....spend time with your friends, **now!**

In our February and March newsletters we reviewed important tips for investing in a secure economic future for our retirement years. Economic security is an important indicator of successful aging. But do you know what the most powerful predictor of life satisfaction after retirement is? Surprisingly it is not wealth, or even health, but rather the size of a person's social support network. This has been a consistent research finding in numerous studies of aging in the past decade.

A recent ten year research project funded by the

"Fate chooses your relations, you choose your friends."

*Jacques Delille (1738 - 1813) French poet.*

MacArthur Foundation under the direction of Dr. John Rowe and Dr. Robert Kahn examined the critical variables to successful aging. "Most important to aging successfully is your attitude and your willingness to stay active and involved socially. Social connections can help fill your life with love, companionship and meaning."

Here are some important excerpts from the findings:

- *Having contact with friends is more strongly related to subjective well-being in later life than having contact with adult children.*  
An aging parent's relationship to an adult child may involve a level of dependency that

detracts from one's overall sense of self-esteem. In fact, one study by Robert Weiss revealed that even when people are comfortably and happily married, the absence of friends exacts a heavy cost in loneliness and isolation. Now this is not to say that family is not an important factor in maintaining a healthy and happy life! It does mean however that family alone cannot provide the necessary social and emotional support needed in later life.

- *Having a circle of friends, particularly long-term friendships, connect us to our sense of history and shared experiences in life.*

Friends seem to call up the 'best in us' while still managing to accept our 'darker side'. Friends help us through the difficult transitions in our lives such as adjusting to illness and emotional loss.

- *The more older people participate in social relationships the better their overall health is.*

"The facts around psychological factors and cardiovascular disease indicate people who feel loved, have friendships, and companionship are more likely to choose practices that enhance health"

- *Loneliness kills* – social isolation may create a chronically stressful condition to which the individual responds by aging faster. One researcher in Britain (Dr. Vin-

cent Maher) states that ‘those who do not have a warm integrated community of contacts are 2 to 4 times more likely to die from heart disease, stroke, cancer, respiratory or gastrointestinal disease’

The challenge to many of us with busy work and family life is to find ways to nurture and preserve the connections with our friends. We may have always known that our friends bring us happiness and joy. Now we know how important they are to the future well being in our twilight years!

- “Unlike a marriage, friendship, in our society, is secured by an emotional bond alone. With no social contract, no ritual moment, no pledge of loyalty and constancy to hold a friendship in place, it becomes not only the most neglected social relationship of our time but, all too often, our most fragile one as well.”

Lillian Rubin, Just Friends

*“A friend is, as it were, a second self” – Cicero  
(106 B.C. – 43 B.C.)*

## **APRIL IS DAFFODIL MONTH FOR THE CANADIAN CANCER SOCIETY**

### **The Single Best Thing You Can Do For Your Health Is To Kick The Cigarette Habit**

**The Bad News:** More than 47,500 Canadians will die from smoking this year. Tobacco is linked to cancer of the bladder, kidney, pancreas, cervix, mouth, esophagus, larynx, colon and breast.

**The Good News:** “Quitting smoking is the single best thing someone can do to improve the length and quality of their life,” according to the Canadian Cancer Society. Even people who have developed tobacco related illnesses can benefit by stopping smoking.

**The Bad News:** It is also very hard to do. The addiction is so powerful. I know. I smoked for most of 23 years between the ages of 17 to 40. I quit dozens of times. I once quit for over a year before I quit for good on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 1986.\*

**The Good News:** I’ve never wanted a cigarette since.

There are up to 4000 chemicals in cigarettes. Many are horrible. But our bodies are amazing.

**20 minutes** after you stop smoking your heart rate and blood pressure begin to stabilize.

**8 hours** after you stop smoking the level of carbon monoxide in your body decreases and the level of oxygen begins to increase to normal levels.

**72 hours** (3 days) after you stop smoking it’s easier to breathe and your lung capacity increases because your bronchial tubes begin to relax.

**1 year** after you quit smoking your risk of heart attack is cut in half.

**10 years** after you quit smoking your risk of lung cancer is cut in half.

**15 years** after you quit smoking your risk of heart attack is about equal to a person who never smoked.

If you want more information call the Canadian Cancer Society’s toll-free **Smokers’ Helpline**. Service available in English and French @ 1-877-513-5333.

\*RUSSELL CARPENTIER

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