Helping elders stay active

Over the last few decades, researchers have begun to build a case for what most of us have long suspected: age is a state of mind. Staying involved—physically, socially and intellectually—is one of the best ways to stay young in body and spirit. Support of loved ones can go a long way in helping older relatives and friends tap in to the fountain of youth. Encourage older loved ones to:



Keep fit. Working out isn't just for the young. Moderate physical activity for 30 minutes, three times a week can prevent bone density loss and improve circulation, appetite and mobility. A short walk, tai chi or a fitness class geared to older participants are all great, gentle ways for seniors to stay energized. Be sure to consult a physician before starting any new exercise program, particularly where limiting factors exist.

Stay safe. Install handrails, ramps, slip-resistant mats, adequate lights and other safety devices to help less agile seniors get around independently, safely and easily at home.

Socialize. Investigate senior's day programs at community centres and places of worship. From painting classes to language lessons, sing-alongs to computer training, day programs give elders a chance to get out of the house and mingle with people who have similar interests.

Get out. If your elder is not able to drive, offer to "chauffeur" him or her to doctor's appointments, the mall or day programs from time to time. If this isn't possible, look into local volunteer and agency-based transportation services.

Connect with the family. Set up a regular visiting time for the family to get together. If relatives live further away, e-mail, phone or write on a regular basis and make an effort to gather for major holidays or celebrations.

Contribute. Volunteering is a great way for seniors to maintain a connection to the community and feel that they're making a contribution. Whether it's packing boxes at the local food bank, reading stories to children at the library or assisting new immigrants with language skills, helping others feels good at any age.

By taking an active role in an elder's life, you'll help ensure they're getting the support they need to stay active, healthy and energized. You'll also benefit from a closer relationship with the elder, and may even learn a lesson or two about remaining young at heart along the way.