



April 7th is World Health Day!



April 7th, 2012 will mark the 64th anniversary of the founding of the World Health Organization (WHO). **The World Health Organization's objective "is the attainment by all people of the highest possible level of health."** The WHO has provided invaluable work to achieve this objective. The global abolishment of small pox and a wide range of public health strategies have been put into effect, and 193 countries are members of WHO. They, collectively, continue to work to improve many aspects of health around the world.

On April 7th, each year, World Health Day is commemorated under the funding of WHO. World Health Day invites all individuals, from global leaders to every person, globally, to focus on a specific world wide health issue that is of major importance and that has global impact. Globally, this is an opportunity to take action to protect the health and well-being of all people.

The WHO's focus this year for World Health Day is Aging and Health. They provide activities and campaigns throughout the world that focus on aging and health, raising awareness of what individuals and governments can do to promote active and healthy aging. **Due to the combination of declining fertility rates and the advancement of technology, which has helped to increase life expectancy, the proportion of people over the age of 60 years is growing faster than any other age group.** Within the next five years, the number of adults aged 65 and over will outnumber children under the age of 5. With the rapid aging of populations, building a prototype for long-term health care becomes a high priority. Countries and health care systems will need to find innovative and sustainable ways to manage with the demographic shift.

This year's slogan for the campaign activities and materials "Good health adds life to years" will focus on how choosing a healthy lifestyle throughout the life span can help older individuals lead full and productive lives longer, and how they can be a resource for their families and community.

Listed here are some facts about healthy aging:

▪ **Healthy aging is linked to health in earlier stages of life:**

Research has shown the effects of poor nutrition, both prenatal and postnatal, with regards to healthy aging. Prenatal undernourishment has been linked to chronic diseases in adult life. Chronic bronchitis as an adult may be caused by upper respiratory diseases in childhood. Obese adolescents are at risk of developing cancer, diabetes, circulatory disease and musculo-skeletal disorders as adults.

▪ **How well we age depends on many factors:**

What we eat, how physically active we are, our exposure to toxic chemicals, consumption of alcohol, smoking and our behaviors will determine our rate of decline, as we age.



Facts on demographics and aging:

- Regardless of where you live, most older people die of noncommunicable diseases rather than infectious and parasitic disease.
- Due to the greater risk of chronic health problems and population aging, the number of people living with disability is increasing.
- Globally, many older people are at greater risk of maltreatment. 4-6% of the elderly, in developed countries, have experienced some form of maltreatment in their own home.
- The need for long term care is rising. Many of the very old lose their ability to live independently because of limited mobility, frailty or other physical or mental health problem. Many require some form of long-term care.
- Worldwide, there will be a dramatic increase in the number of people with dementias as people live longer. 25-30% of people aged 85 or older have some degree of cognitive decline. In low- to middle-income countries this makes it hard for families to care for them, as there is no publicly funded support to help with the care at home.
- Older people can be especially vulnerable in emergency situations. With natural disasters or armed conflict, people over the age of 60, are the majority who suffer the most. Death and disease can overtake them, due to them finding it hard to flee or travel long distances. Often times they are left behind.
- It is not the age that limits the health and participation of the elderly. Rather, sometimes it is individual and societal misconceptions, discrimination and abuse that prevent active and dignified aging.

The goal of WHO, with this year's World Health Day campaign, will strive for the participation of all of society – from policy makers and politicians to older people and youth – to:

- make a commitment to help create societies which appreciate and acknowledge older people as valued resources and enable them to participate fully.
- help educate, protect and improve health as we age.



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