

HOW TO ENJOY HEALTHY AGEING

Active steps people can take to improve their health as they age



Shirley Kelly doesn't have healthy ageing at the top of mind each time she steps on the dance floor. But the five classes she enjoys each week give her both exercise and social benefits – two key factors in reducing the risk of age-related illnesses, including dementia.

The 85-year-old resident of Argyle Gardens Bundaberg regularly attends classes in square dancing, round dancing, and another form of dance similar to tap dancing called clogging.

With almost 50 years of dancing experience under her belt, it is helping her live out the experts' recommendations for a healthy life – staying active, social and engaged.

"When I started square dancing, I just loved it, absolutely loved it," she said.

Healthy ageing is an international priority as the world grapples with an ageing population.

The last 12 months saw the start of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing as a global collaboration to improve the lives of older people and their communities.

In Australia, positive ageing that maintains functional abilities is being championed by doctors who advocate physical and mental health, a healthy diet, social connection and effective relationships as a way to enable wellbeing.

Associate Professor Michael Woodward, AM, is one of Australia's leading experts on ageing and an honorary medical adviser to Dementia Australia.

The specialist of geriatric and general medicine and rehabilitation said there were key pillars to healthy ageing that people could prioritise in middle age.

"Healthy ageing is not just the lack of disease," he said. "You need to have a purpose in life, you have to be



interacting, you need to be mentally and socially and physically active."

He said critical ways to maintain health throughout middle and later age were to follow the Mediterranean diet, with enough physical activity, half an hour of mental exercise daily, social interaction and getting enough sleep.

This combination of activities can reduce the risk of

PRIORITY: The last 12 months saw the start of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing as a global collaboration to improve the lives of older people and their communities, inset below: Shirley Kelly.

developing a number of illnesses, including dementia, which is the leading cause of death for women in Australia.

"We don't want to assume memory loss is a normal part of age," he said.

"If you've got repeated lapses of memory or uncharacteristic changes in personality or behaviour that don't seem to be due to depression or anxiety, then it's worthwhile having a chat with your doctor."

For Ms Kelly, healthy ageing means staying active with dancing and gardening, getting out and about, keeping the

mind active with music, and maintaining social contact with others.

"It's keeping active, living a good life, eating healthily and sleeping – and music," she said.

"Music floats with the mind. You haven't got time to think about your troubles and all the rest of it because you can float away with the music."

For physical health, Ms Kelly is among the one in three Australians aged over 65 years who does sufficient activity of 30 minutes of exercise five times a week, according to statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

"Clogging gets your heart rate up because the music is lively, but with square dancing and round dancing, it has a much more pleasurable timing," she said.

"It all depends on how much you're dancing and how much you put into it. What you put into it is how much you get out of it."

But while Ms Kelly enjoys the physical exercise, she has long known the importance of the social element to her classes – which improves her overall wellbeing.

"It's all social," she said. "You've got to have your social times when you have a talk and have a bit of fun, definitely."

Ms Kelly said prioritising her social life was made easier in her Argyle Gardens retirement community, because there were fewer home maintenance jobs and more people at the same age and stage of life.

"You've got your neighbours, you've got the people over the road," she said.

"You take the dog for a walk and you meet other people with their dogs and have a little chat."

"In a suburb, everyone is more involved with things around their own home. Here, your lawn is mowed and things like that. You don't have to do it so you've got more time."

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