

Own Your Future

Aging Well: **Mental Wellness**

Title Graphic: Mental Wellness

Harry Johns, President & CEO, Alzheimer's Association:

Someone develops Alzheimer's disease in America every 72 seconds.

The Alzheimer's Association certainly believes that people should plan for their long-term future. Overall, individuals who are in the 50 plus range have increasing risk for dementia, particularly as they reach 65 and older. One in eight individuals who are over 65 have Alzheimer's disease and many others have many other forms of dementia. At 85 plus one in two have Alzheimer's disease as well as other dementias.

Mel Crystal:

My wife's cognitive skills are gone. Frontal temporal dementia was the diagnosis. She's only 62 years of age. We've been married almost 41 years.

Harry Johns:

When an individual develops the disease, often times it will first present as memory loss, as a problem with an individual's memory, remembering names, remembering places, perhaps forgetting how to get home.

Mel Crystal:

Cognitive impairment is one moment being able to converse, apparently with no problem. And then all of a sudden, you're sitting there, step one, it's like a deer in the headlights. Everything zones out.

Harry Johns:

People who become caregivers for an individual who has Alzheimer's disease often don't realize the length of the disease. It can take years for an individual to go through this difficult journey. They often don't realize the ongoing nature of the thing day to day.

Americans are aging better today. We know much more about having a healthy lifestyle and aging. Considering Alzheimer's disease, other dementias, heart disease, diabetes, all the major risk factors apply really across those disease considerations. So people can do a better job of aging simply by improving those lifestyle characteristics.

Brad Willcox, MD, MSc Co-Author, Okinawa Centenarian Study:

In Okinawa we say ikigai. What's your ikigai? What's your reason for getting out of bed in the morning? What keeps you going? For some people it might be spiritual factors - their church, their community, their own inner spirituality.

Of course there's psychological factors. If you're depressed, and that's a big problem with elderly people in this country, is depression is one of the major causes of morbidity of a disease, if you will, simply because we face so many challenges in life and many other things are happening...

People are losing relatives, and so depression needs to be treated—recognized in older people and treated, and differentiated from dementia, from memory loss, cause the—cause the two can go hand in hand.

There are many things, I think, that people can do to work on their—their—their odds for healthy aging and many of them are social factors.

So, the more you can maintain a network of support, the better. In almost every community you can find daycare programs where you can engage in activities that stimulate the mind, exercises, be with other people.

When we talk about the four legs of the chair - the dietary, the physical activity, the psycho-spiritual and the social, social engagement, I think, is very important, social support. So, the more you can maintain a network of support, the better.