Ageing well and staying healthy

Panellists examine what can be done to help a rapidly ageing population stay healthy and ensure the older folk get the care they need.

Salma Khalik
Senior Correspondent

A rapidly ageing population is too big for any one country. This was the shared view of the panelists at a recent Straits Times forum titled "Managing Singapore’s Health: The Challenges and the Solutions".

"We are not alone in this," said Dr Goh Chia Yeong, Assistant Professor at the National University of Singapore’s business school. "The world is ageing, and the problems of an ageing population are not confined to Singapore."

But there are also things that older people, if they retain health, can contribute to society. The key is to keep people healthy and help them stay healthy for as long as possible.

"There are things that older people can do. They can help to lessen the burden on the healthcare system by staying healthy. And they can also contribute to society by staying engaged and active," said Dr Goh.

The forum was moderated by Salma Khalik, a correspondent at the Straits Times.

104 and still going strong

At 104, Benjamin Tan Choon Chong still looks for a good meal every day, and never lets his age keep him from trying new things. He lives in a neighbourhood, though the walks are shorter than when he was a few decades younger.

He is one of 2,000 people here who are over the age of 90. There are another 10,000 people aged between 80 and 90. In Singapore, about 21,000 elderly people live alone.

After his wife passed away 10 years ago, he moved in with his daughter and her family. But he still lives on his own.

"I have to keep busy," he said. "I have to keep my mind active."

He said he reads newspapers and listens to the news on the radio. He also takes classes in Chinese calligraphy, and teaches them to his students.

"I like to keep my body healthy," he added. "I like to keep my mind sharp."

The forum also touched on the importance of health care for the elderly.

"We need to keep our minds active," said Dr Goh. "We need to keep our bodies healthy."

"We need to keep our hearts happy," he added. "We need to keep our spirits alive."

"We need to keep our families together," he concluded. "We need to keep our communities active."

"We need to keep our futures bright," he summed up. "We need to keep our present shining."

Salma Khalik

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As a diabetic, I can manage. As a hypertensive, I can manage. As an overweight person, I can manage. I can manage a lot of things. But it's very clear that the buck stops with me. I can't blame anyone else. I have to take responsibility for my own health.