Keeping an active, aging mother healthy

Q. My mother is in her late 60s and is still in great health. She stays active by walking and chasing around her grandchildren. I would like to know if there are ways that I can help her maintain her healthy lifestyle. I would like her to be as happy and healthy as she can be for as long as she can!

A. Maintaining and enhancing overall health and wellness involve considering the holistic model that includes a focus on the body, mind and spirit connection. Traditionally, most health education is focused on physical aspects such as diet, exercise, proper nutrition and dental care - all are important aspects for a healthy lifestyle.

Even though aging brings a greater risk of illness and most health teaching is focused on how to stay physically well, we need to give equal consideration to the complex nature of human beings that includes several aspects:

- Physical
- Social
- Emotional
- Intellectual
- Occupational
- Spiritual

All of these components interact to influence the balance of our wellbeing.

Your mother’s active lifestyle indicates she is making a personal choice to enhance her health. It is important for family members to support her current actions and encourage her to also maintain her social connections such as involvement with her family and others, towards enriching her state of social wellbeing.

Promote your mother's attention to the emotional and intellectual aspects of her life that involves tuning into her feelings and managing stress, along with encouraging mental stimulation that is available from reading, keeping up with current events, utilizing "brain" gym exercises such as puzzles and memory enhancement activities for further enrichment.

Suggest she volunteer or maintain an occupation, if possible, as a great way to achieve a sense of belonging and productivity through the dignity of work. This action helps to maintain self-esteem and sense of belonging that is often compromised as we grow older.

Your mother, like each of us, needs to feel that we matter and we have a purpose in life. Encourage your mother to explore spiritual centered beliefs to enhance spiritual wellness. Promote check-ups with your mother’s primary care provider and
encourage follow-up and adherence to recommendations.

Given her age and opportunities to make wise decisions, your mother has the potential to add not only years to her life but "life to her years."

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