

Video: Why water is one of the best anti-ageing products

Transcript

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According to the United Nations, ageing is likely to be one of the most significant social transformations of the twenty-first century, as virtually every country in the world is experiencing more older people in their populations.

Today, in the UK, there are almost 11 million people aged 65 and over - 19% of the total population. That's a big number. In 10 years' time though, this will have increased to almost 13 million people, which makes 22% of the population.

Living longer feels like a good thing, right? But the number of years people spend feeling fit, well and in good health are actually declining and unfortunately many people's experience of ageing is getting much worse the older they get and it doesn't have to be that way!

We are living longer but are we living well while ageing?

So the question is, what can we actually do, as individuals, to take some control of our own ageing and do all we can to stay well, keep well and in turn, age well.

The Five Pillars of Ageing Well is an innovative model that helps people do just that. Encouraging healthy ageing behaviours in five key areas: Nutrition, Hydration, Physical, Social and Cognitive Stimulation. I specialise in engaging members of the public with health initiatives like these and explaining why they are so important for our ageing well.

In my work, I find that hydration is often one of the pillars that is often overlooked when thinking about ageing well.

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An example could be – as we get older, our metabolic rate decreases. This is our body's way of measuring calories and the energy we need to perform even basic functions, like breathing.

As our metabolic rate slows down, it impacts other parts of the body too, like our brain, blood circulation and performance of all other organs.

But keeping well hydrated counteracts some of the slowing down of the metabolic rate, helping our organs to function better and supporting our mind and body to work and feel better too.

And that's not all – good hydration can do so much more for us as we age.

There's no avoiding the fact that when we grow older, we are at higher risk of having multiple long-term health conditions, which we call polymorbidity. This often leads to the need to take several different medications to treat each condition, which we call polypharmacy.

All this medication tends to put even more stress on our vital organs like liver and kidney – and this may slow them down. The liver metabolises the medicine after it does what it's meant to do and the kidneys flush out anything we don't need so that the medicines don't stay in our bodies for too long.

Now, our livers and kidneys are already affected by ageing. So, that reduces the blood flow and volume, which means they shrink and the older we get the slower they work.

Then, if we are also taking multiple medications, they need to work even harder to process and flush it out, which slows them even more.

You might be thinking, okay, so they're working, just a bit slower as I age. Why does that matter? Well, these functions are actually very important because as a rule of thumb, the less time medications stay in the body the better, as we are less likely to suffer the side effects.

Here's where hydration comes into play.

If we are dehydrated and have a more sedentary lifestyle, which we might tend to do as we get older, this slows our metabolic rate and the way our organs function even more. Drinking more, on the other hand, helps to boost our metabolic rate,

which I have already mentioned, as well as the function of all other the organs to do what they need to do.

If we are dehydrated, medications tend to stay in the body for longer, which increases the chances of unwanted side effects and the drugs in our body interacting with each other.

When they do - this is likely to change the way we feel, physically, psychologically, and emotionally. It will possibly make us feel more sedated, confused, dizzy - it will not make us feel good and strong enough to move about and we may stay even more sedentary than usual.

Then once we get up, we may feel wobbly and weak, which may increase the risk of falls and falls-related injuries. This brings about a fear of falling, and cause us to move about even less and so the vicious circle continues...

Lack of hydration can substantially affect the way our body functions, and our overall ageing experience. I've touched on how it impacts processes like our metabolic rate, organ function, and overall wellbeing, and there's many more too. The way hydration can improve or hinder our ageing well experience is not to be overlooked.

We can't turn back the clock either. We are all ageing and we cannot stop that. But preventing any harm is much easier than restoring any damage to our bodies, so our focus should always be on prevention in the first place.

Staying hydrated might feel like flippant and simple advice for these complex bodily functions and ageing experiences. But the truth is that good hydration helps enormously.

So let's be clear, drinking water is not a fix-all, but it helps, significantly. It can prevent ill health or the worsening of existing conditions, limit side effects of medications. It can help us stay well for as long as possible and it is just one of the Five Pillars of Ageing; you can read more about the other ones in the video description. And they are all ways in which we can take better care of our own physical as well as psychological health and wellbeing and age well.

So, however busy we are, whatever we do, we should try to find a way to build the habit of staying hydrated and with this, take better control of some of our ageing.