

It is never too early to start looking after your overall health

It is never too early to start looking after your overall health, and research shows that the earlier one commits to a healthy lifestyle, the greater the benefits in one's older years.

Healthy ageing has become a major focus for many global health organisations and for good reason. As the world's population of older adults increases both in number and in proportion to overall populations, it is becoming more important to explore ways in which people can enjoy their longer lifespans.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines healthy ageing as, "the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables well-being in older age."

According to the WHO: Functional ability is about having the capabilities that enable all people to be and do what they have reason to value. This includes a person's ability to:

- meet their basic needs;
- learn, grow and make decisions;
- be mobile;
- build and maintain relationships; and
- contribute to society.

The term "wellness" has come to be applied as a holistic concept which encompasses physical, mental and emotional health. Auria Senior Living, which develops and operates senior living communities around South Africa, encourages residents to participate in wellness programmes developed by in-house professionals, and based on global best practice.

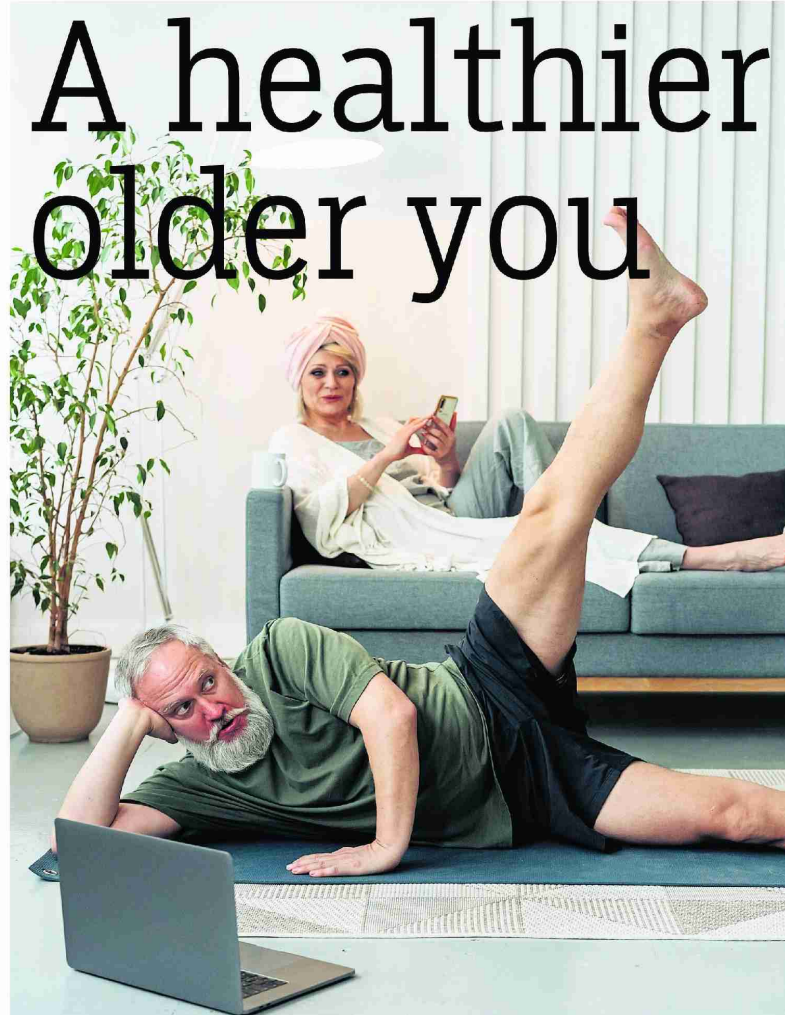
"The benefits of staying healthy and living a balanced life as one gets older are well documented. We see the benefits in our residents who have committed to healthy lifestyle choices on a daily basis," said Barry Kaganson, CEO of Auria Senior Living. "They include better general physical health, the ability to recover from illness or injury faster, and reduced likelihood of chronic disease. These in turn promote continued ability to participate in meaningful activities, leading to increased overall well-being."

According to Kaganson, there are five key tips one can follow for healthy ageing. They are the following.

BE PROACTIVE

Being proactive about one's physical health in the following ways is one of the most powerful things one can do over the course of a lifetime.

Getting enough exercise and physical activity is an important factor at any stage of life, and it is never too late to start. "Aside from the other benefits of physical fitness, the ability to stay agile is crucial



as one gets older," said Kaganson.

According to the U.S. Centres for Disease Control (CDC), one in five falls causes a serious injury such as broken bones or head trauma. Having regular check-ups at the doctor, dentist and any other relevant medical professionals, is also advisable. The earlier one can identify a potential problem, the easier it is to address and the less likely it is to have a serious impact on quality of life later on.

Nutrition plays a key role in physical health. Just as we take care of our children's diets as they grow, so we should pay the same attention to our own nutritional needs, which change as we age. "Auria Senior Living provides nutritionally optimal meals for seniors, designed in consultation with an experienced chef. However, for those who still enjoy being in the kitchen, it is relatively easy to educate oneself and cook accordingly," he said.

Getting a good night's sleep is also important at any stage of life, but many older people report having struggles with sleep. Good sleep is frequently tied to good exercise and nutrition, but it can also be promoted by having a consistent sleep routine and getting the correct amount of sleep for one's age and life stage.

BREAK UNHEALTHY HABITS

Many of us develop unhealthy habits over

our lifetimes, and these can have lasting negative effects on our health. In our younger years, it may be easy to exercise more to offset a few extra bars of chocolate, and even as we get older it is relatively easy to give up poor dietary choices.

However, there are other habits that can have serious health consequences down the line, such as smoking, drinking alcohol and even taking unnecessary medications. "The sooner one can give up some of these unhealthy habits and replace them with better ones, the sooner improvements in health can be seen," said Kaganson. "The health benefits people can feel by kicking unhealthy habits are significant, as stopping them removes a great deal of stress placed on the body."

MAINTAIN MENTAL AGILITY

Mental agility is just as important as physical agility as one ages. Many of us don't think about this much during the course of careers which can challenge us mentally, or even home schedules that keep us busy, but once those demands are removed, the opportunity for mental "exercise" can decrease.

Staying mentally active helps stave off cognitive decline, and it is thought that it may even play a role in reducing the impact of conditions such as Alzheimer's disease. There are many ways to stay mentally fit, whether you learn a new language, take up crosswords or Sudoku, develop a new hobby or stay in touch with your old workplace in a consulting capacity.

EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

The more our understanding of wellness grows, the more we know how important emotional well-being is to overall health. At all stages of life, there are certain things which are known to take an emotional toll on a person. These include stress, anxiety, depression and a lack of purpose in life. Just as we need to take time to work on our physical health, so we need to take proactive steps to reduce stressors in our lives, get appropriate support when we are struggling, and find ways to connect with our deeper selves. This might be through religious or spiritual practices, therapy or something creative such as art.

"Recent research has shown that there are also tangible health benefits to having a strong sense of purpose in life," said Kaganson. "It is often through such practices that we reconnect with this sense of purpose." This then translates into better physical and emotional health.

KEEP UP SOCIAL CONTACTS

Social isolation and loneliness are significant health risks in older adults, rivaling smoking, obesity and physical inactivity as a cause of premature death, according to the CDC. Social isolation is also associated with a higher risk of dementia. "Having regular social contact and feeling part of a community are some of the best ways to counteract depression, and give people a reason to get up in the mornings," said Kaganson. — Auria Senior Living.