

Adding Years to your Life

Everyone has an opinion on retirement and they're all different, some negative and some positive. Of course there are lots of jokes like the one about the woman, who when asked how she felt about her husband retiring, said well, it's twice as much husband but half the money! It seems as if it's the men who are afraid of retirement as they just don't know what they'll do with themselves. Women seem to easily fit in with book clubs, knitting, sewing, art and charity work, but not men. Work seems to define some of them and they are scared to stop.

Friends asked how we were coping with retirement. Our answer ten years into retirement – we don't know how we had time to work, we are so busy. We highly recommend it. It adds quality to our lives and we are very busy making memories so that one day when we are not so active, we can relax on an easy chair and revisit all our exciting times and think of all the new friends we made in 'our golden years'.

The first thing to do is to plan for retirement – the money available for a comfortable lifestyle is essential, good health of course and then one of the most important things to plan for are activities to keep one occupied both physically and mentally.

Of course there are unforeseen circumstances that impact on pensions and savings. One cannot always control health but living a healthy lifestyle will certainly go a long way to adding life to your years.

One must treat life as a privilege and live it in such a way as to use every precious moment. Remember old age is just a number, we don't have to behave as if our life is over. Don't just sit alone at home, get out and do something. Everyone can offer something.

The first thing we suggest is to do things for others. Charity work in all forms can be very rewarding. Giving back is important whether it's helping on the garden committee, knitting and sewing for fundraising, helping in charity shops or at schools and hospitals. Places like Hospices and Kids Havens, churches who run soup kitchens, are always looking for volunteers. Reading to those who struggle to see and even just visiting a lonely person is suggested and who knows, it may help you as much as you help others. It's important and I would even say vital, to feel you have a purpose in life, something to get up for in the morning.

Some activities can cost a lot which will impact negatively on limited budgets but there are a variety of things to do that are either free or very inexpensive. Just get out and do it. Our diary is so full, our kids have to make appointments to see us. Be curious – live longer! Go out and learn new skills.

We know of an elderly lady of 98 who still drives and plays bridge. My husband's golf buddy is 87. He plays 18 holes of golf and then does line dancing in the afternoon. He does the 5kms parkrun every Saturday and beats many people a lot younger than him. John and I do the parkrun every Saturday and we also volunteer to help. Parkruns are free, all you have to do is get to the venue and there are many all over South Africa. We've now done over 150 parkruns and we are known as tourists as we've done at least 20 different parkruns in the Cape, Kwa Zulu Natal, Free State and Gauteng. We've made lots of new friends as well so the myth that it's hard to make friends when one gets older is incorrect.

Hiking is another activity we enjoy and we have our hiking group. We share transport, celebrate communal birthdays, enjoy the outdoors, wildlife and camaraderie. This can be very inexpensive too as pensioners get special rates. We have a beautiful country and what better way to see it than by being in the fresh air surrounded by nature? Cycling is another thing we've done and we've had exciting times on our tandem doing thousands of kilometres around the country.

South African Association of Retired Persons better known as SAARP, offers monthly meetings at which there are interesting talks offered on a variety of topics. This is very stimulating and many new friends are made. Members, at a cost of R200 per year for couples and R120 for singles, can join outings to shows, night trips to the zoo, picnics, boat trips and adventure golf to name a few. No need to be lonely or bored.

Joining a gym, or running or walking club, is not for everyone but the number of elderly people who exercise is growing and they are reaping the benefits. We are often greeted by admiring youngsters as granny, Gogo or 'madala' and one time on a race were enthusiastically cheered on as 'Timers'! Often we have been spurred on to increase our speed when we hear an 80 year old woman catching up to us.

Caravanning can be recommended. Pensioners get special rates during off peak times for long stays and many retirees sell up their houses and live in their 'vans' and tour South Africa, basically cheaper than they can live at home. Caravaners are very social and new friendships are made which are renewed annually. Problems are shared and tips given. Strangers are just friends you didn't know!

Make dreams become a reality! To end off, just think of the 80 year old lady from the Cape who drove in her 20 year old car all the way from Cape to Cairo. She had different companions on the way but she did it and she's itching for more adventures.

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