



Research
Centre
on Aging

Sherbrooke
Geriatric
University
Institute
(SGUI)

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This newsletter is aimed at people who participated to the projects of the Research Centre on Aging. It is also distributed to anyone who wants to receive it. **Contact us!**



Encrâge

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Grandchildren: a joy for grandparents

Suzanne Hamel, PhD

The importance of grandchildren in grandparents' lives is one of the aspects spontaneously mentioned by more than half of the elderly people interviewed in a study on self-actualization and spiritual actualization. In this recent study done at the Research Centre on Aging, we conducted in-depth interviews with 40 people aged 60 and over. With the help of my research assistants, Marie-Josée Larochelle and Mélanie Couture, we analyzed their comments by age group.

People in their sixties

Two tendencies emerge in the relationships of grandparents in their sixties with their grand-children. First, some emphasize the enjoyment they get from this contact. For example, they feel less isolated,

they like doing things with them, they take them on trips, or just play with them. For some grandparents, it is particularly satisfying to maintain an ongoing, joyful and supportive relationship with their grandchildren. As one of them said, "The older my grandchildren get, the more I enjoy them. I crawl around on the floor like them. We talk about all kinds of things. I chitchat with them to find out how things are going. I help them if I can. We have fun. I want to know what they are doing. When they ask for my advice, I give it. Sometimes the older children call to ask me what they should do. For me, this is real life."

The second tendency observed among grandparents is the desire to take care of their grandchil-

dren. This attitude is expressed in different ways: (a) helping their grandchildren who are having problems when their parents divorce, being there for them and reducing the



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emotional impact of what they are going through; (b) babysitting very young

children when their parents are absent; (c) helping financially and emotionally, not just their grandchildren but also their adult children when they need it. One example is helping their daughter who is a single mother get out of poverty and spending more time with their grandchildren whose father is not around.

On the emotional level, people in their sixties say they have a great need for affection from family members. They want to give and receive love: hold babies in their arms, hug their grandchildren and joke with them, visit them regularly, promote family harmony, feel proud when one of them does what they set out to do. Also, many grandparents mentioned that they like being physically close to their children and grandchildren. Those whose grandchildren are far away miss them and say they do everything they can to see or communicate with them as often as possible.

People in their seventies

For people in their seventies, their relationships with their grandchildren seem to be part of their pride in having a family. They think it is important to keep in touch with their children and grandchildren even if they live far apart or things are complicated because they themselves have remarried. They want family relationships to be harmonious. They often get news of their family and hope they do not have any health or other problems. As one of them said, "I watch my grandchildren develop because I love them as much as my children. I have six grandchildren. I give them gifts on their birthday, and I worry when they are sick." Another grandfather said, "I'm like a mother hen. I call them all the time." On the emotional level, it seems that the need for affection of people in their seventies is expressed more by the pleasure of feeling that they belong to the family they have created than by the satisfaction of playing the role of a protective grandparent. When they talk, they mention the whole family. Knowing that it is intact and united reassures them.

Also, their relationship with their grandchildren focuses less on activities.

People in their eighties

For people in their eighties, the way they look at their grandchildren, and sometimes their great-grandchildren, is more contemplative. For example, some enjoy watching the way they behave and being with them in active, lively surroundings: "I had three children, four grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. I only have three great-great-grandchildren. I see them nearly every week. It really livens up the house. Kids are running around and yelling. I spend more time watching them than playing with them." Others, who do not have the daily responsibility for their education, are content to take advantage of special times to watch and contemplate their grandchildren while they are taking a bath or playing and to watch the older ones talking. Some elderly people think differently in light of their experience. For example, they observe their grandchildren's talents and even their mission in life emerging from when they are very young, and that they often take after their parents.

Conclusion

People aged 60 and over love their grandchildren and want to be loved by them. However, our research results show a change in their approach with the decades. Those in their sixties have more active contacts with their grandchildren. People in their seventies are more likely to show their feelings of satisfaction and success with their progeny, a feeling of a job well done. The approach of people in their eighties to their grandchildren seems to be more that of an observer, even contemplative in some cases, which allows them to distance themselves from the action, while still being deeply committed. ♪

Diabetic Research at the Research Centre on Aging

Daniel Tessier, MD

Aging is often associated with well-known diseases such as arthritis, arterial hypertension or high blood pressure and cardiovascular diseases. Some lesser-known diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, are probably just as important among the elderly.

This relatively discreet form of diabetes often reveals itself through high blood-sugar levels (glycemia), but without any symptoms. Epidemiological surveys suggest 20 to 25 per cent of people aged 65 and older meet type 2 diabetes criteria, making it a global health problem.

Type 2 diabetes is associated with complications, whose degree of severity varies, in many different organs. For elderly people, these complications can affect the cardiovascular system. Studies indicate that elderly people suffering from diabetes run a greater risk of developing blood circulation problems. Throughout my eight years working in internal medicine, I've had the rather unpleasant opportunity to witness the damages caused by this disease. When I decided to resume my studies and dedicate them to research, I made up my mind to experiment and to better understand how diabetes affects the elderly.

The first step undertaken was to evaluate drug treatment of this disease. Most elderly diabetic people take one or more drugs to lower their blood sugar levels. These medications, even if they are efficient, sometimes bring about side effects, the main one being an excessive glycemic drop called hypoglycemia.

A study conducted several years ago made us realise that the anti-diabetic drug gliclazide (Diamicon) is associated with less hypoglycemia among the elderly. Right now, our Centre is involved in a new study on gliclazide. This time, the drug is designed for prolonged action and can be taken in one daily dose (Diamicon MR). Many

centres across Canada are involved in this study, whose subjects are people recently diagnosed with diabetes aged 65 and older.

Diet and exercise are two important elements in the treatment of type 2 diabetes. When drugs are prescribed, doctors must emphasise the importance of maintaining healthy eating habits and exercising on a regular basis.

In one of our studies, a group of diabetics followed a tri-weekly fitness program. We advised a second group to walk outside a few times a week. The comparative result between these two groups shows reduced glycemic levels meals among people who exercise. Therefore, supervised physical activity combined with the appropriate drugs improves the control of diabetes among the elderly.

Scientists at the Biological and physical research area of the Research Centre on Aging are specialised in measuring oxidants and anti-oxidants. Results of some studies suggest type 2 diabetes is linked with an important oxidative stress (excess of oxidants). We've observed that elderly people suffering from diabetes have lower antioxidant levels than people in good health.

Our studies confirmed that type 2 diabetes among the el-



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derly is associated with high levels of oxidative stress. This can partially explain complications associated with this disease. Following this observation, I undertook a project with Dr. Tamàs Fülöp, Dr. Abdel Khalil and a student (Marie-Noëlle Caron). Her role is to evaluate the effects of the diet on oxidant and antioxidant levels within a population of elderly diabetic people.

More recently, our group received a grant from the Canadian Diabetes Association to study arterial hypertension among elderly diabetic people. Arterial hypertension often accompanies type 2 diabetes. These two diseases accelerate cardiovascular damages. Moreover, studies suggest that arterial hypertension is poorly controlled among the diabetic elderly.

We conducted a study in which we measured on a continual basis the blood pressure of a subject in his or her own home. We think that

measures taken during a medical visit do not reflect the true profile of blood pressure. For example, some people suffer from stress when they visit their doctor, resulting in higher blood pressure. To study this aspect, we used a tool called "ambulatory monitoring of arterial blood pressure". This device, which resembles a pager, was fastened to the patient's arm. That patient then returned to his home. Repeated measuring of arterial blood pressure levels were taken for a period of 24 hours. This study has just been completed, and we are in the process of analysing results.

Finally, many elderly people suffer from type 2 diabetes, which contributes to a loss of independence among this group. Many elements of this disease are poorly known or remain to be discovered. Research should help us to better understand diabetes. It should also give us the necessary tools to further control or prevent complications. 🗿

VIEILLISSEMENT RÉUSSI : PRATIQUES DANS LA VIE QUOTIDIENNE ET ENJEUX DE RECHERCHE (SUCCESSFUL AGING IN EVERYDAY LIFE AND RESEARCH CHALLENGES)

This free conference is aimed at the general public. It will be presented on May 7, 2003 at 7 p.m. in the Delta Sherbrooke Hotel. The conference will be in French.

Guest of honour : **Marguerite Lescop**, author

Moderator: **Yanick Villedieu**, host of the radio show Les Années-lumière, Radio-Canada and journalist at the magazine L'Actualité.

The other guests:

Réjean Hébert, Scientific Director of the Institute of Aging and **Yves Joannette**, director of the Research Centre of the MGUI will talk about research on aging. **Serge Gauthier**, neurologist at McGill University will do a presentation on Alzheimer's disease.

Information: (819) 821-1170 extension 2285
www.colloque-vieillessement.ca

BOARD OF GOVERNORS CONFERENCES — Spring 2003

The Board of Governors Conferences are free and are intended for the general public. This activity is made possible by the Sherbrooke Geriatric University Institute's Board of Governors in partnership with the Townshippers' Association, the Coalition estrienne d'association des personnes retraitées and the Commission des aînés et des retraités de l'Estrie. These conferences will be presented in the Amédée-Beaudoin Community Centre, Lennoxville.

The art of taking your medication
Why can't I sleep anymore

by Maryse Rioux, pharmacist,
by Dominique Lorrain, PhD,

April 8 at 2 p.m.
April 29 at 2 p.m.