

The following article is based on a radio talk on RSG which was presented by Johannes Jordaan in 2014 and was based on the book - *PRIME TIME – Enjoy your life after 50*, of which he is the author. More info about the book is available from johannes@myprimetime.co.za

Psychological problems associated with growing old.

Beware of regret.

Regret can be a big time waster and may even lead to depression.

A man of 75 was quoted saying the following at his sister's funeral.

If I could have my life over again...

- *I would travel more and visit more interesting places*
- *I would play with children more often*
- *I would come to rest more and I'd make more time to smell the roses*
- *I would not take life so seriously*
- *I would express love more often - to my fellow human beings, and especially to those nearest to me*

But the irony is, I cannot have my life over again.

However, the lesson we can all learn from the piece above, is to be proactive and to do those things while we still can. If we postpone, we may never have the opportunity.

Your *Prime Time*, i.e. your retirement years, or your old age, are the last phase of your life. There are many reasons why it should be the *happiest and most fulfilled* time of your life.

For instance, during that time

- you now have all the free time you need to do all those things you always wanted to do but never had time for,
- you usually carry less pressure and stress,
- you (hopefully) have saved enough money to finance many pleasurable things without having to keep on working for your money. You often can afford things which you couldn't when you were younger and had many obligations to attend to.

Yet your happiness during your retirement still remains a matter of *cause and effect*. That means it will only be a happy time if you deliberately plan for it and do the right things well in time and also withhold yourself from doing the things that may spoil your happiness.

It is the purpose of the book *MY PRIME TIME – Expert tips for enjoying life after 50* to make you aware of these realities and to provide you with information on *what to do* and what *not* to do to arrive at happiness and fulfilment. It also provides guidance on how to plan your retirement.

It is also being said that your adjustment to retirement is psychologically and emotionally one of the most difficult periods of your life.

Some of the realities you have to adjust to, are

- the fact that you become redundant at your work all of a sudden
- that you suddenly are not needed anymore
- that your self-image takes a serious knock. The fact that you lose the status you enjoyed in your work, may affect your self-image negatively.
- you lose many of your friends who were work related
- you may also find that your health situation may start to deteriorate as you grow older. It is often a matter of “the distant enemies which become regular houseguests”.
- you lose the income you were used to receiving every month, and if you haven't saved up sufficient funds to replace it, your security may become seriously compromised.

Soon you will have lots of additional free time on your hands. This can either bring happiness to you or boredom if you don't plan for it and manage it well. Boredom is one of the root causes of depression especially if it is coupled with a negative impact on your self-image.

Most of the above realities can easily lead to depression if you do not manage them well.

At what age these realities (especially your health situation), will start affecting you and how serious it will be, will be heavily influenced by the lifestyle you lived when you were younger e.g. to what extent you preserved your health. Many diseases can be delayed for a long time as you grow older provided you live a healthy lifestyle.

How should you preserve your mental health?

The Greek philosopher, Epictetus, came to the following conclusion about 100 years before the birth of Christ already:

- *That people are not emotionally disturbed and they do not attract depression because of what they experience.*
 - *It rather depends on how they **perceive** these experiences*
- Proverbially it is the glasses through which you look at experiences.*

If we can therefore learn how to manage our minds and to acquire the ability to perceive what happens to us in a positive and constructive light, we have gone a long way to prevent depression.

Worries seem to be part of our lives whether we like it or not.

We, for instance, tend to worry about many things. The following are examples:

- Our health situation
- Whether our nest egg is sufficient to provide our living needs

- Our relationship with our family and friends
- Our deteriorating bodily functions, our health, and our fitness

Worry can easily be translated into anxiety. This goes hand-in-hand with depression. The danger is that negative thinking and anxiety may build up a negative momentum in your mind. This negative thinking pattern can then easily pull you down into a depression. To prevent it, you should condition your thinking so that you will not allow negative perceptions to gain a momentum in your mind.

Healthy escapist activities can also help to prevent this. Examples are, participating in sports, going to see a movie, watching TV etc.

But if you apply positive conditioning and healthy escapist activities and you still feel a depression coming on, it may be time to make an appointment with a psychiatrist. Bear in mind that feelings of depression often come and go and most of the time the feeling of depression may only be temporarily. In that case you should not take it seriously. With time it will go again.

But if it stays with you, the cause may be a lack of neurotransmitters in your brain which may cause them not to function effectively. In such a case your psychiatrist may prescribe antidepressants for you to overcome the problem.

You should always try to establish what the main causes are that may cause you to become depressed.

Here are a few possible ones:

- self-reproachment
- blaming of others
- self-blame
- negative perceptions and thoughts of vengeance against others
- feelings of powerlessness especially when you experience unfairness against you
- Constant anger and hostility in your subconscious mind
- To feel threatened and anxious about certain expected events

Ideally medication should be taken only temporarily. A 'quick fix' may make you feel better, but you want to get better and stay mentally healthy in the long term. It has been found that cognitive treatment i.e. managing your thinking processes, has a better chance to help you to get better and stay healthy in the long term. There are however, exceptional cases where patients are put on antidepressants and sometimes even have to stay on it permanently.

Some people perceive retirement as a very negative phase in their lives. Some people even refer to it as to go and sit in the 'waiting room for death' But this perception need not be experienced - it all depends on how you manage

your perceptions about it. Remember that you *can* in most cases choose your perceptions about retirement. You should guard against going into denial about the implications of retirement and old age, but rather deal with it sensibly.

Your retirement period (or your Prime Time period), as we prefer to refer to it, has many positive things to offer. Plan to utilise and to enjoy these, focus on them and do not allow negative perceptions to enter your mind, let alone to get a grip on your thinking.

Sometimes people experience a so-called '*existential vacuum*' when they enter their retirement phase. All of a sudden their lives feel empty and meaningless and they don't feel as though there is a reason to live anymore. Before they know, they can be sucked into a depression. The safest and best way to prevent this is to be preventive and proactive and to start planning for what you are going to keep yourself busy with during your retirement, well in advance. The book referred to in the next paragraph, has a specific chapter focussing on it.

When you arrive at your retirement, you should have planned in advance for the emotional adjustments you are going to have to make, and had to stay active and remain positive about it. Beware of boredom.

The book *MY PRIME TIME – Expert tips for enjoying life after 50* is available from Johannes Jordaan on johannes@myprimetime.co.za