

Theme 2

Health from Early Childhood to Old Age

A person's state of health depends on numerous factors. For instance, babies, children, teenagers, women, men, and seniors all have different health problems and needs.

Babies' Health

The news that a new baby will be arriving is a source of joy for the parents, but things don't stop there. The parents have to start preparing for the birth from the outset. A child's first learnings, from birth on, will have a significant impact on the rest of his or her life. Parents may have a number of questions about their baby's development. Once the baby is home, what care and attention will be required? What essential examinations are needed? When should he or she be vaccinated? How can they recognize injuries when the baby does not talk yet? How do they know if medical attention is required? What should the baby be fed? Those are all questions that have a direct impact on a baby's health.

Children's Health

Babies get bigger and become children. It is at this point that they learn the rules of good lifestyle habits. It is important for children to eat right and to engage in physical activity. A healthy diet helps to build a healthy body and contributes to forming good habits that will last a lifetime. Physical activity helps to maintain mental, social, and physical health and to prevent disease. In addition, health has a direct impact on children's learning. Parents need to understand their child so they can calm night terrors, ease entry into kindergarten, etc. They also have to deal with minor health problems such as earaches, colds, and stomach aches, and larger problems such as asthma, diabetes, and food allergies. How can children be helped to adopt good lifestyle habits? How can obesity among young people be prevented or reduced? How can children be helped to adapt to change and stress? How can children's health problems be detected? When are health care services required? What medications and what dosages should be given to children? These are all questions that need to be answered to ensure children's good health.

Teenagers' Health

Adolescence is an important stage in life. Teenagers are no longer children but are not yet adults. It is a time of firsts: first love, first sexual experience, first contraception, first cigarette, etc. Certain behaviours may lead to chronic illness in the long term. Although adolescence is generally a period of good health, injury, depression, alcohol or drug use, violence, and risky sexual activities may pose a threat to the health of teenagers. Many other problems may affect teenagers as well: obesity, bulimia, anorexia, suicide, etc. How can they be helped through their adolescent crisis? How can they be encouraged to avoid behaviours that are harmful to their health and adopt good lifestyle habits?

Women's Health

Women generally attach more importance and pay more attention to their health than men do. They know more about what is good for them and what is not. Women also feel responsible for the health of their family members. As a result, they are prepared to do things to improve their family's health but do not have a great deal of time to look after their own health. Yet women have special needs when it comes to their health: fertility, pregnancy, menopause, breast cancer, osteoporosis, etc. Also, the physical changes related to a woman's life cycle (menstruation, pregnancy, menopause) require a great deal of mental adjustment. Although life expectancy among women is greater than that among men, more women die of cancer and heart disease. More women report depression, anxiety, and poor health. Women's self

esteem is undermined by their appearance, obesity, the quest to be slim, pressure to be perfect wives and mothers, not to mention domestic violence. Even if women are more attentive to health, how can they be encouraged to look after their own health more?

Men's Health

Most of the health problems of men are related to their behaviour and lifestyle. Men are very close-mouthed when it comes to their health. This does not mean they are in better health. They attach less importance to their health and do not inquire about it. When sick, men tend to let things go until their condition worsens. For some men, having health problems means being weak. They will therefore hide pain, illness, or their psychological state. As a result, it takes time for physical or mental illnesses to be identified, making them more difficult to treat. Yet a number of problems affect men: prostate cancer, heart disease, accidents, suicide, etc. How can men be helped to adopt healthier behaviours and lifestyles? How can they be encouraged to take more of an interest in their health? How can they be encouraged to see a doctor before their situation get worse or before it is too late?

Seniors' Health

Older people are more likely to suffer from chronic health problems, to be limited in their activities, and to depend on someone else for their daily activities. However, seniors do not all age at the same rate. Some remain in good health even at a very advanced age. Certain health problems are more common among the elderly: arthritis, rheumatism, high blood pressure, cholesterol, heart disease, diabetes, emphysema, osteoporosis, cataracts, memory problems, limitation of activities, solitude, depression, suicide, etc. In addition, injuries or fractures often occur during falls or accidents in the home. These problems lower their quality of life, but their impact can be limited by the adoption of good lifestyle habits. The number of seniors who engage in physical or leisure activities declines with age. Good dietary habits among the elderly tend to decline with age as well. Their perception of their state of health has an impact on their functional status, quality of life, and choice of a possible placement in a seniors' residence.