More living to 100 years old in Singapore

Access to medical care extending twilight years but quality of life is a worry for some

Shara Tan

The centenarian club is used to facing health problems, said Associate Professor Kalyani Mehta, head of the gerontology programme at SIM University.

"People who live longer may get more health problems, especially skin, lung or cardiovascular problems," she said. "But this is a small price to pay to enjoy more healthy years.

"On the other hand, a healthy lifestyle is better than a long one, if you are ill most of the time," she added.

Nutritionists said that a balanced diet and regular exercise are key to extending the twilight years. "Men live longer than women because they tend to have better diets, lead healthier lifestyles and are more self-sufficient instead of letting them up as much as women do," said Prof Ng. 

Numerical data from the Singapore Department of Statistics showed that a girl born last year could live to an average age of 81.4 years old, about 3.5 years longer than men. 

Singaporeans are living longer and the city is one of the fewest aging populations in the world, the youngest in Asia. The average life span was 87.7 years for men and 83.3 years for women -- almost seven years deeper than it was a decade ago, said Prof Ng.

Chief among these is their support and care in their children, who would probably have no problems finding them or even dead by then. Prof Mehta said the gap should probably be tackled with other policies and programmes that make them stay for longer in the aging society.

The Singapore Department of Statistics showed that the number of centenarians has balloon in the past two decades.

A United Nations report released last year estimated there will be 3.2 million centenarians worldwide in 2015, up from 750,000 in 2000, the department said. 

"The surge comes as the growing number of centenarians will have host of implications for policy makers," said the report.

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When The Sunday Times spoke to the older couple, who turned 100 this year, their health was excellent all along until recent years. They attributed this to medical advancements in treating diseases and disorders. The older couple can all afford good medical and other types of care, adding to their quality of life. 

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