

10/04/2004

Secret of youth is not pills but a healthy life, says Dr Siti Hasmah

Zulita Mustafa

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Ever wondered why former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad looks younger than his age?

The secret, according to his wife Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, is not in any magic pill but ordinary things that anyone can do to preserve youthfulness.

"It is important to keep an interest in life. Doing work which we like helps. Keeping busy also helps," she said.

At their age, Dr Mahathir, 78, and Dr Siti Hasmah, 77, are still bouncing with energy, fulfilling invitations to functions when they can rest at home enjoying their retirement.

Dr Siti Hasmah, speaking on her husband's secret of health, said sufficient sleep was one of the reasons Dr Mahathir was always energetic.

"The reason why Dr Mahathir could work after a long flight from London to Kuala Lumpur was because he slept throughout the journey.

"I am giving away his secret but I don't think he would mind," she said to laughter from participants of the Second Malaysian Conference and Exhibition on Healthy Ageing at Berjaya Times Square.

Dr Siti Hasmah who, like her husband, is a medical doctor, said the ability to sleep well, moderation in eating, avoiding alcohol and smoking and regular exercise were assets of healthy living that help to prevent ageing.

A happy marriage, family unity and the feeling of being needed by family members were other important factors.

"When you reach my age, and after 48 years of marriage, and your husband still says he wants you to accompany him on his travels, you drop everything and just go," she said.

Another ordinary habit that could slow down the signs of ageing, she said, was smiling.

Dr Siti Hasmah said ageing was not a Western phenomenon anymore because lifespans were increasing in developing countries with healthcare standards improving. "We need to take proactive measures to age well."

The three-day conference is organised by the Malaysian Healthy Ageing Society (MHAS) in collaboration with Universiti Putra Malaysia's faculty of medicine and health sciences, aimed at educating the public on what they could do to live healthily.

Present were MHAS president and consultant geriatrician Dr Rajbans Singh, UPM Vice-Chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Mohamed Zohadie Bardaie and organising chairman Associate Prof Nathan Vytialingam.

The conference was attended by international medical and health industry experts. It ends on Sunday.