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LIFE | WELLNESS

Your parents keep saying they're "just getting old". Here's what a doctor wants you to know

From muscle loss to constant fatigue, many of the changes we write off as ageing can actually be managed. Here's what to look out for

By Shazrina Shamsudin - 30 Oct 2026



Credit: Getty Images

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Your mum takes a little longer to get up from the sofa these days. Your dad has quietly stopped going for his evening walks because he's "a bit tired". And they've both caught their second cold in as many months. Whenever you bring it up, the answer is always the same: "Getting old lah."

It's an easy explanation to accept. But according to Dr Margaret Million Samin, a family physician at Raffles Medical Group, many of the changes we write off as ageing aren't something to simply shrug

off. More often than not, your parent's body is trying to tell you something. So we asked her to put some of the most common assumptions to the test.

"Muscle loss only matters after 50"

MYTH OR FACT: MYTH

Most of us picture muscle loss as something that happens much later in life. In reality, sarcopenia, the gradual loss of muscle mass and strength, can start as early as our 30s and speeds up from our 40s onwards.

But here's the uncomfortable bit. If your parents are in their 50s or 60s, they've likely already lost a meaningful amount of muscle.

The good news? According to Dr Margaret, this is exactly the window where prevention still makes a real difference. Two things matter most: strength training, and getting enough protein.

"A healthy weight means they're getting enough protein"

MYTH OR FACT: MYTH

It's tempting to look at a parent who's neither too thin nor too heavy and assume they're eating well. But the number on the scale doesn't tell you much about what's happening to their muscles.

Even parents who seem to have a good appetite often fall short on protein. That matters, because protein is the nutrient most directly tied to preserving muscle. A plate can look perfectly balanced and still come up short.

"Getting sick more often is just part of ageing"

MYTH OR FACT: MYTH

Immune function can change as we get older, but Dr Margaret is clear that it isn't something we should simply accept. Good nutrition, regular physical activity and adequate rest all play a part in keeping the immune system working as it should.

Certain nutrients deserve a closer look too. Vitamins C and D, zinc and vitamin B6 all help support normal immune function, so it's worth checking whether your parents' meals are giving them enough of each.

“Losing muscle affects more than just strength”

MYTH OR FACT: FACT

Now for one that’s actually true. Muscle isn’t only about how much your dad can lift. It shapes how we move and keeps us active, which is why its decline tends to show up in everyday life first.

Climbing the stairs, carrying the groceries home, keeping up on a family outing: these can all become harder as muscle mass drops. Many people also notice they tire more easily than before. That’s why protecting muscle health is such an important part of ageing well.

“More fatigue is something to expect with age”

MYTH OR FACT: MYTH

If you’ve noticed your parents running out of steam earlier in the day, it could be worth looking at what’s on their plate. Many adults don’t get enough iron and folic acid, which can contribute to fatigue. They may also be low on B vitamins like B1, B2 and B3, which help the body release energy from food.

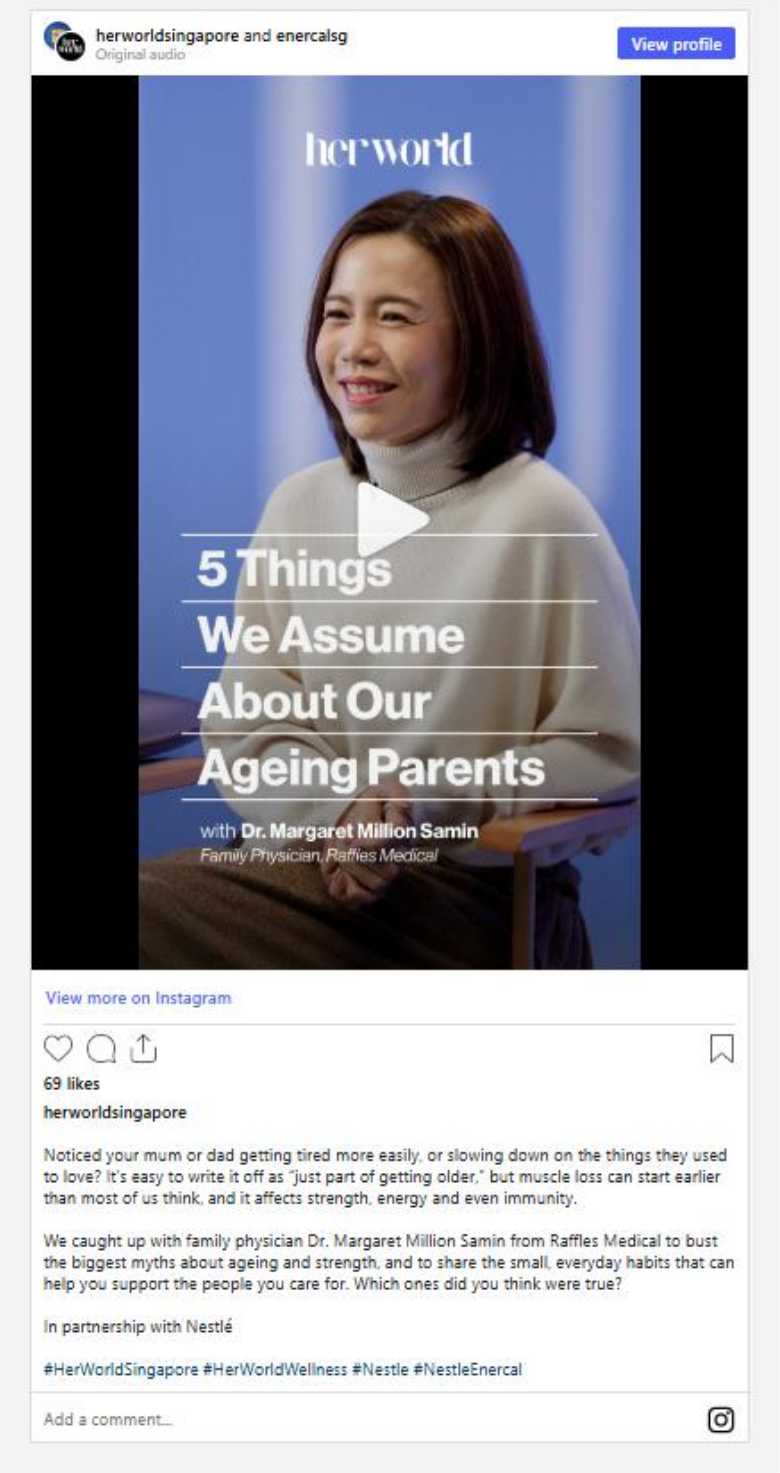
The fix doesn’t have to be complicated. Dr Margaret suggests starting with a few simple additions:

- A serving of leafy greens with lunch or dinner.
- Swapping in wholegrains for some of the white rice or bread.
- Eggs, which are easy to cook and easy to eat.
- Legumes such as beans and lentils, added to soups and stews.

That said, meeting all of these needs through meals alone can be a challenge, especially for parents with smaller appetites. Nutritional drinks can help fill the gap. For instance, Nestlé Enercal Complete is a balanced milk drink with a whey and soy protein blend to support muscle, along with vitamins A, B6, B12, C and D, iron and zinc for normal immune function.

The takeaway

So the next time you hear your parents complaining about being lethargic because of ageing, it might be worth looking a little closer. Muscle loss, constant tiredness and frequent illness aren’t simply the price of getting older. They’re signals, and many of them can be managed with the right food, regular movement and a few small habits. Ageing is inevitable but feeling weaker doesn’t have to be.



This article is part of Her World's Ask the Expert series, in partnership with Nestlé and Raffles Medical Group.

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