

LIVING A FULL LIFE

HI THERE,

thank you for picking up this booklet! In these few pages we would like to highlight some challenges faced by mature gay* men and questions in life that they may ask.

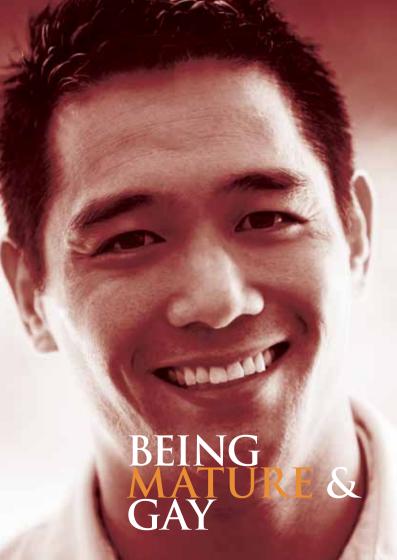
In this booklet, we are covering some of the topics related to aging as a gay man in six chapters:

- ♦ Being Mature and Gay
- ♦ Finding Connections
- ◆ Same Sex Relationships
- ♦ Financial Health
- ♦ Sexual Health
- ♦ Staying Active

We hope that you find some of the thoughts presented here useful and inspiring and that you will take some of the pointers we present in this booklet and move forward with them.

^{*} This booklet is prepared for a wide range of male readers. For the purpose of writing this booklet, the term *gay* is used here to include bisexual men and other men who are attracted to men.





Getting older (at any age) can be challenging, but it can be a really happy and fulfilling experience. There are many others who talk of "peak performance", a "sexy midlife" and the "best years of their lives" as they embrace their mature age.

A mature gay man can be a caring, active and charismatic person. Your life experience has provided you with a repertoire of coping skills, resilience, better sense of self, assertiveness as well as support system.

SET A VISION FOR YOURSELF

Having a sense of purpose and passion and being able to impact the world with one's talents is a central feature of being at a mature age. What makes you really happy and allows you to shine? Many find nurturing close relationships, managing career goals or maintaining household important. Others increase their commitment to family and parents, or getting involved in activities related to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) or straight communities. It is up to you to create that vision for yourself.

BEFRIEND THE MIDLIFE

The much talked about "midlife" incorrectly implies that there is little time left to live your vision. You may experience anxiety and apprehension at realizing that you have lived half your life and you begin to re-assess what you have accomplished so far. This is the perfect time to revisit your original vision. Maybe you'll find that it doesn't fit you anymore and that it should be changed. Remember, it is never too late to start planning or adjusting your life direction so that you can enjoy your mature age.

MAINTAIN A POSITIVE OUTLOOK

What we say to ourselves impact our mood and behaviour. Our internal dialogue affects whether we look at life through a lens of optimism and hope, or pessimism and negativity. You can start by removing that "monster in your head" through examining your self-talk.

- ♦ What does it say about being middle-aged?
- ♦ What does it say about starting a new gay relationship at this stage of your life?
- ♦ What does it say about you?

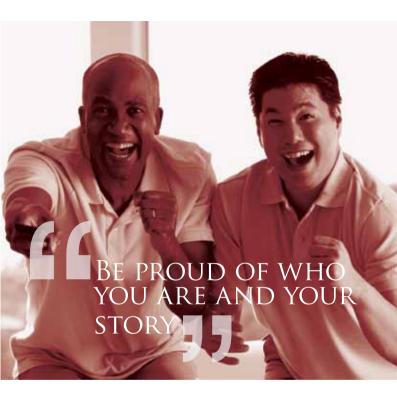
Maybe this could be a good opportunity to change the way you feel about yourself! You can talk to a professional on how to enhance your life or you can share it with someone who has overcome some of the hurdles through this part of life.

BUILD YOUR SUPPORT TEAM

Nothing helps you through the challenges of getting older better than a solid support system of friends and people who care about you. Invest in current and new relationships to give you that sense of connection that we all need. Try to look for other midlife gay men who can serve as role models. You could even become a mentor to someone else!

ENJOY YOUR AGE

Your future is within your control and you can steer in the direction you want it to be! You are as young as you think, and resisting the fact that life changes will only keep you blocked in your development. Learn to accept all the physical and emotional changes that accompany growing older. Be proud of who you are and your story.



For some individuals, their path to self-acceptance is not an easy one. However, gay men who have made that journey will tell you that true happiness really lies in loving and embracing the person you see in the mirror. Some people managed to achieve self acceptance at a younger age but gaining a better understanding of yourself when you are older can also be a very empowering experience.



CONNECTING WITH SELF

Most people are continuously on a journey of self-discovery, some start young and many only establish a better understanding of themselves when they are more mature. Through many conversations with mature gay men, what was striking was that their relationships with others became more enriching when they understand and accept themselves better. So whether it is physically, psychologically or emotionally, start understanding and loving yourself more.

The level of self-confidence can affect your relationships with your partner, your family members and even your friends. Self-confidence can be viewed in different ways. For some, it means knowing what you are able to achieve for yourself; for others, it is the knowledge that you are fine and you have an equal right to be here.

There are many ways to enhance your self-confidence and here are some examples:

- ★ Keeping healthy through exercise
- → Grooming that presents you at your best
- ◆ Reading on things that stimulate your thoughts
- ◆ Travelling to places that inspire you
- Having a good mix of companionship or friendship that affirms you.

For some mature men, having gone through ups and downs in life will also give them a better sense of self control and confidence in maintaining their lives. By understanding what interests you and keep you going, you can be alone but not lonely. In short, a positive mind is often translated to a healthy physical self.

CONNECTING WITH FAMILY

Family forms the core of a support system to many and can be made up of your same sex partner, opposite sex partner, children, parents and siblings. In the case of a mature gay

man, even the extended family such as

nephews and nieces is important. Many receive comfort and care from family members, especially if the relationship is close. This tie is particularly crucial as you age and require further attention and care from others.

For some people, when things are not working out well with their family of origin, they have a group of close friends or family of choice whom they can turn to. Your family of choice can be made up of straight or gay friends who can provide mutual support when necessary.

FRIENI

Many mature gay men have the unspoken responsibility of looking after aged parents, siblings and sometimes even grandparents, especially if they are the only one who is not married. Also, they could be in a committed relationship and are playing the caregiver role to their aging partner.

It can be a draining experience to be a caregiver. If you need better understanding of your caregiver role, there are a number of resources. You could employ a domestic helper or nurse specialising in care for the elderly and arrange for day care or residential care services. You can find a directory of eldercare services on *Centre for Seniors*. At the same time, you can learn how to be a helpful and self-caring caregiver or get social or emotional support by joining a caregiver support



network. You can also make a difference by forming a gay friendly caregiver network and share your own experience and wisdom.

No matter what your care arrangement is, it is advisable to discuss the decision with other family members or concerned persons so that it is a shared responsibility for everyone. Remember, you do not have to be alone in this.



CONNECTING WITH FRIENDS

Many mature men who grew up in a less open and accepting society during the 1960s to 1980s may struggle to cope with their own sexuality. Many are already taking a bold but small step to find new friends, gay or gay friendly straights.

If you are only beginning to venture out to make gay friends now, it is not too late. If you don't know where to start, begin with joining some of the informal gay groups or networks such as Blowingwind, Rainbower or TheBearProject. Oogachaga also organises workshops for mature gay men as well as discussion groups such as the Saturday Tea Sessions on a regular basis.

Whether you are currently having a close relationship with your family of origin or family of choice, being in a group of like-minded friends with similar interests can be healthy for your mental health. Whether it is singing together at the karaoke, going for movies, bowling, travelling, trekking, doing yoga, having a meal or drink together or simply going for a walk, you will find many choices for activities. It is time to take your first step and connect to someone out there.

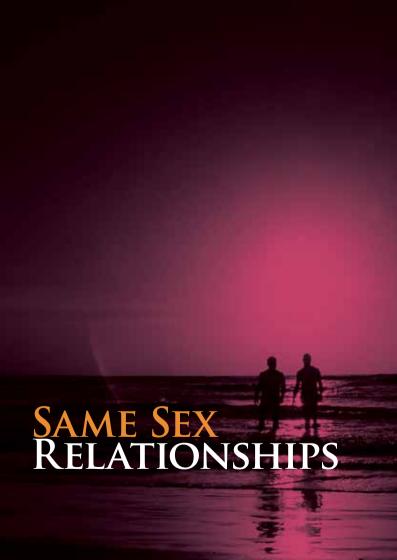
CONNECTING WITH THE LARGER SOCIETY

All of us have to interact with the society and it can be a mixed experience at times on how others accept or reject you based on your sexuality. If you are coming out in the later stage of life, you may find that redefining your relationships with people around you is a new challenge. Just as you took a while to come to terms with your own sexuality, you will find some straight people only starting to understand the LGBT communities better.

Keep an open mind and remain positive. You will find getting along with most people easier when you learn to accept people as who they are. After all, you also have the wisdom and experience to cope with people who are misinformed about the LGBT communities. If you are comfortable with who you are, do keep a lookout for fellow gay men who need your support too. Share with them that the journey, especially starting out late can be tough, but it will get better.

Lastly, you have vast life experiences and these can be translated to benefit the society through charitable work in gay or 'mainstream' charitable organisations. If you are near retirement or semi retired, the administrative or technical skills you acquired throughout your career can still come in useful in many ways for these organisations. You can shape your mature life positively by staying connected and active.

CENTRE FOR SENIORS website: www.centreforseniors.org.sg email: admin@centreforseniors.org.sg contact: 6478 5015



Whether you're gay, straight or bisexual, it is natural to seek healthy and fulfilling relationships. A healthy same sex relationship is one that requires work, perseverance and optimism! As a mature gay man, there is added pressure of living in a society and community where youth is celebrated. But equally, being older and having more life experience will be an advantage that many younger men will envy you for.

Let's immediately debunk three common myths about gay dating:

MYTH ONE: GAY RELATIONSHIPS DON'T LAST

Many people think that gay relationships are short-lived, however there are also many gay couples in healthy, long-term relationships (and they are usually not as visible as single guys or younger couples). If you are working on how to improve your relationship, talk to these couples for better insights. There are some workshops by Oogachaga that can help you to understand gay relationships better and learn skills on enhancing these relationships.

MYTH TWO: GAY RELATIONSHIPS ARE DOOMED TO FAIL BECAUSE GAYS ARE PROMISCUOUS

Many couples believed that monogamy (or not) is an issue which should be discussed openly with your partner. Every couple is different, but many healthy relationships include a mutual understanding that sexual liaisons with other people may happen. Many couples ironed these out by setting their own rules and boundaries within the relationship. These discussions also allow couples to adopt safer sex practices within their relationships. The best recipe for a happy union

will always include open communication in order to build trust with your partner.

MYTH THREE: YOUNG MEN ARE JUST INTERESTED IN YOU FOR YOUR MONEY.

Many mature men who are attracted to guys of younger age may be holding back because of the common misperception that younger men are only interested in their money or that they are not stable enough for a relationship. On the contrary, many mature gay men have shared that they have meaningful relationships with younger men. While some do not mind contributing more financially to the relationship, others make sure it is balanced. Like all relationships, set your own rules and limitations with your younger partner. If you need some support in managing the relationship, talk to a counsellor, look out for a supportive network that meets your needs or discuss these concerns with couples who have worked these out.

FINDING GOOD THINGS IN LIFE TAKES TIME

As simple as this may sound, you will find dating a lot easier if you know who you are and what you want. Why do you want a relationship? Do you fully understand your own sexuality, values and boundaries? Are you conservative in life (and love) or more adventurous? And do you know your type, based not just on looks, but also on personality?

Now that we have debunked some of the myths in gay relationships, here are some ideas on how to meet guys.



GAY VENUES

There are many gay men who love socialising and dancing. If you are nervous about the bigger lounges, smaller, less intimidating ones such as small karaoke bars are great meeting places

too. Heterosexual clubs are worth a try – many gays go to straight clubs with their straight friends.

INTRODUCTIONS BY FRIENDS

This is actually one of the most recommended ways by many to meet a guy, given that your gay and straight friends/coworkers would know your personality traits and the type you are looking for. So if your friends are not busy setting you up, ask them to! And if you don't fall in love with the 'referral', you can at least be friends and expand your social network from there.

COMMUNITY GROUPS OR EVENTS

There are plenty of activity groups or social events for you. Mature Men Project social events by Oogachaga or informal social groups like TheBearProject or Rainbower are good places to start with. Pelangi Pride Centre has a well stocked library if you are into reading and keen to look for someone who enjoys



a good book. Pick up a *What's Out Here Guide* to check out all the gay groups available. If you cannot find any activity group that suits you, you can form one yourself too. Post your thoughts in online forums such as Blowingwind and get mobilised.



ANYWHERE

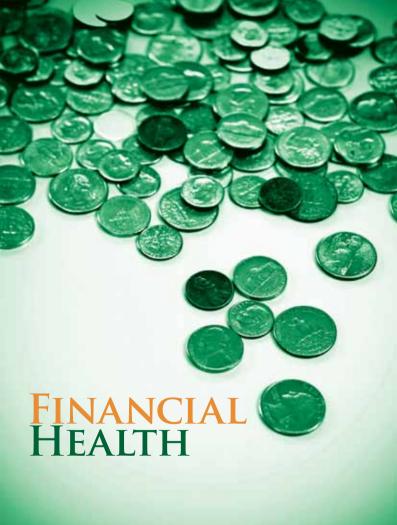
As with everything in life, the chance to meet that special one will happen when you least expect it: in a lift, at a friend's dinner, whilst you are out walking, in the MRT – or, yes, even at a bus stop, as pointed out by one mature man we spoke to. The idea is to create as many good opportunities for you to meet someone – preferably

in a space that you feel very open and comfortable in. It is not the event, the space or group that makes the difference but how you cherish each opportunity to socialise.

And remember, finding good things in life takes time. So be patient, and try not to let a rejection scare you off. Instead of taking rejection personally, think of it as life protecting you from an unsuitable relationship and consider it as a learning experience that will bring you closer to your ideal partner. Go on, give it a try. For more tips on gay dating, download a copy of *Gay Men Dating Survival Guide*.

WHAT'S OUT HERE GUIDE http://www.oogachaga.com/whatouthere

GAY MEN DATING SURVIVAL GUIDE http://www.oogachaga.com/gaymendatingguide

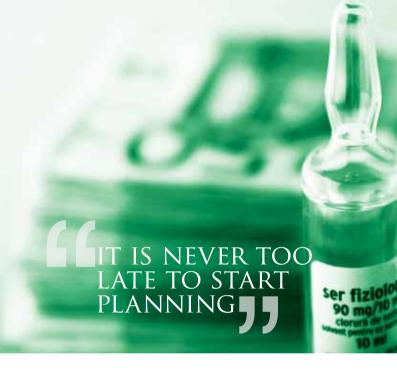


RETIREMENT FUND

Financial planning for retirement is often neglected by younger gay men. Studies have shown that most gay men, whether or not they are in a relationship, will most likely rely on their own savings without family's financial support once they are retired.

If you are a Singaporean or Permanent Resident and contributing regularly to your Central Provident Fund (CPF) account, you might be planning to fall back on it once you retire. You can talk to your financial adviser on how your CPF can be better utilised in private investment schemes or term life insurances that can supplement your income. Other secondary income options are room rental income or the ownership of small businesses. Also, as a rule of thumb, it is wise to clear your mortgage loan before you hit the age of 55.

Do not worry if you have not started your retirement plan, it is never too late to start one. Even if you are less financially well off, you can start your retirement plan by saving whatever amount of money you can and cut down on non essential expenses. Consult a financial planner or use the retirement calculator on *CPF Board website* to get an idea on how much money you need for retirement. Always get a good assessment on the investment risk you are prepared for. You could also consider extending your career life or taking up less stressful part time employment in order to help in your planning.



MEDICAL COVERAGE

As you grow older, your health may deteriorate. Having adequate medical coverage can help you pay for medicine and treatment that may be required along the way. Taking up additional insurance plans apart from the CPF Medisave and MediShield ones can support these financial needs. Also find out how much these plans will cover deductible and coinsurance in your medical bills as well as the ward class you are entitled to. If it is within your means, do consider critical illnesses and total disability protection.

WILL PREPARATION

To ensure that your loved ones are protected after your death you need to leave a will. If you don't, any possessions will be passed on to your nearest family member by default. This means that if you and your partner lived in an apartment you owned, he may have to move out should you pass away as it will then be owned by your nearest family member. Therefore make sure you draw up a will early in life for better assurance to your partner and to avoid unnecessary disputes.

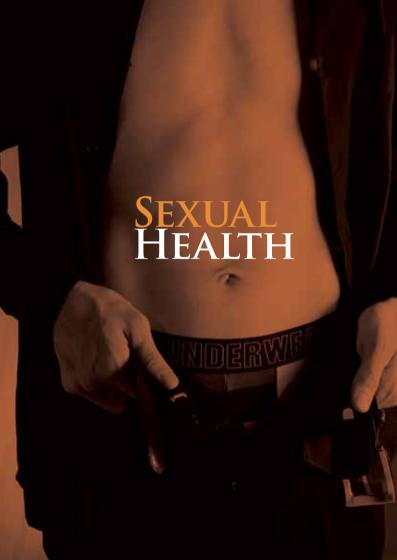
LASTING POWER OF ATTORNEY

If you are concerned about who can look after your personal matters such as finance when you are older, seek advice from a gay friendly lawyer on appointing a Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA). An LPA is someone who has the ability to make decisions, including financial on your behalf if you are unable to do so. You may want this to be your partner, but it doesn't have to be. Make sure it is someone you trust! This person can also advocate on your behalf to insurance companies and medical care providers. Go to *Office of Public Guardian website* for more local information on this topic.

CPF BOARD RETIREMENT CALCULATOR

http://mycpf.cpf.gov.sg/Members/Retire-Plan-Games/Retire-Planner-Games.htm

OFFICE OF PUBLIC GUARDIAN http://www.publicguardian.gov.sg



SEX IS JUST AS FUN

Sex at a mature age can actually be just as fun as before. You are more experienced now, you may not rush things as you used to and take more time to enjoy. You may also find you are now more creative and sensual. These are some of the possible reasons why you might be more attractive to other men.

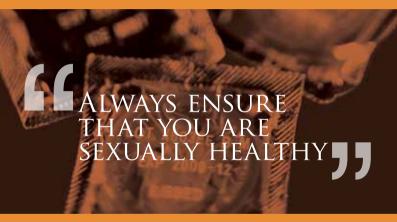
While for some men, sexual appetite may decrease with advancing age, this is not true for everyone. In any case, to enjoy good sex as well as general well-being, it is now even more important to look after your body. Therefore, try to eat a balanced diet, do sports regularly, maintain a good work life balance and take any supplements as advised by your medical professional.

Some men may find that they cannot achieve an erection as easily as they used to. Also, the erections may not be as firm and last as long. This is quite common and you can experiment with different positions and sex enhancement aids such as sex toys to achieve more arousal. If you are not interested in anal sex anymore, there are still plenty of ways to enjoy intimacy with someone. Also, you can discuss with a specialist how your medications affect your sexual performance.

SEX CAN BE SAFE TOO

Sex should be pleasurable and positive regardless of your age. It is also important to always practice safer sex, not only to guide your partner as a positive role model, but also for your own benefit. You can start by arming yourself with knowledge on HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections

(STIs) from *Action for AIDS* or TheBody.com. Condoms are the best way to protect yourself sexually and they are easily available at convenience stores or you can get free ones from Oogachaga or Action for AIDS too. Some people make the use of condoms more fun by getting flavoured condoms or condoms with enhanced texture. Make condoms part of your sexual life by talking about its use with your sexual partner as well as finding creative ways to put it on while having fun.



Always ensure that you are sexually healthy for yourself and your partner by doing regular HIV and STIs test. If you are concerned about confidentiality, you can visit any of the anonymous HIV test clinics listed on page 35 in this booklet. For those who are unsure on how a HIV test is done, AFA has an online video that shows you how simple a HIV test is so you can be better mentally prepared. *DSC Clinic* at Kelantan Lane also runs a men's health clinic on

every Wednesday, 8 to 11am where you may find it easier to ask some of the most embarrassing questions. Do call 6293 9648 for an appointment. Lastly, in a situation where you had unprotected sex, or the condom broke or slipped during sex less than 72 hours ago, check with DSC clinic and see how they can help with Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP). Call 6294 6300 for more details.

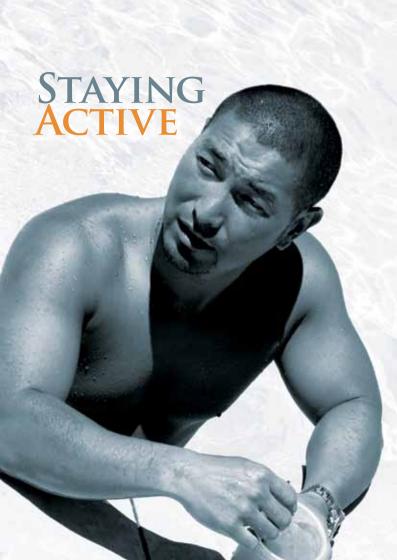
AGING AND HIV

Some gay men in the community are HIV positive and have been living with HIV for a long time. If you are aging and living with HIV, it is of utmost importance to follow the treatment regime as advised by your doctor. You can continue to enjoy a sexual relationship with your partner, but bear in mind to use a condom at all times to prevent HIV transmission to your partner. It is also your responsibility to inform your partner of your status, that you may build up a mutually trusting and supportive relationship. Talk to a gay friendly counsellor in Oogachaga if you are living with HIV and finding it hard to manage your concerns about your sexual behaviours or the health of your partner. You can also find support from other HIV positive guys through the Action for AIDS support group. It is still possible to enjoy good sex and healthy same sex relationship when you are living with HIV.

ACTION FOR AIDS

website: www.afa.org.sg email: info@afa.org.sg contact: 6254 0212

DSC Clinic (Men Health Clinic) website: http://www.dsc-sexualhealth.com.sg contact: 6293 9648



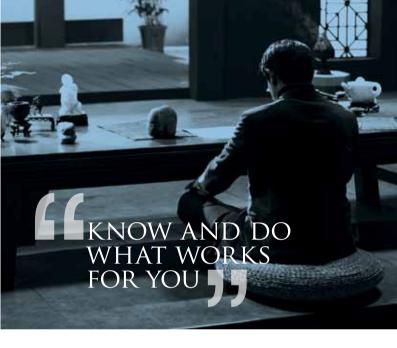
To different mature people, being active would mean different things. Some find joy in reading, listening to music, watching DVDs, gardening and other activities which can be done privately and in the comfort of their own homes. Others prefer to go out and participate in activities and outings with friends. Many find contributing actively to their communities through volunteering or connecting to themselves mentally and spiritually as fulfilling. Well, the important thing is to know and do what works for you.

FINDING YOUR SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS SELF

Many mature men shared that spirituality or religion helps them in maintaining a positive mindset. This could be a good time to reconnect with these aspects of your life and reflect on your life journey. You will be pleased that there are gay friendly religious groups such as Free Community Church, Heartland or As-Salam that you can consider if you need one. You can also get connected to yourself by doing self reflection daily. Organise a fixed time daily to write a one-sentence journal or take a look back on your day, to think about what you did right and wrong, what could be improved.

TAKING UP A HOBBY

Consider taking up a new hobby like drawing and painting especially if you are talented in these areas. Other kinds of hobbies include photography, singing, dancing and travelling. Finding others who like the same hobbies would really make it more exciting; especially for many mature men who would most likely have more time after reprioritising goals in life or are slowing down and looking forward to retirement.



If you appreciate arts, apart from the National Heritage Board art galleries and museums for the general public, there are good art collections in gay-friendly places like Utterly Art and DYMK in Chinatown. If you have always wanted to write a book, it might be a perfect time to start the project.

SHOPPING

If shopping is what excites you, you may want to visit some boutiques catered for LGBT communities as well as many other online local stores such as SportsMenAsia or No Frills Factory Outlet. There are clothes that suit all ages ranging from the more conservative to the daring.

STARTING YOUR EXERCISE REGIME

Exercise keeps you physically healthy and for many, a good way to destress and maintain a positive mental health. However, caution should be taken especially if this is not something you have been doing all along. You should consult a doctor before starting on your exercise plan. Having a buddy or a group of friends to exercise with you is always a plus in terms of motivation and bonding. They can keep a lookout for your safety too.

USING INTERNET TO SOCIALISE

If you are keen on private one-to-one dates or wish to connect with others online, you can try popular chatrooms like Sgboy and Gay.com. Besides chatrooms, you can meet people online through portals like Fridae.com, Trevvy.com, Planet Romeo, Dudesnude or Manjam and gay social networking mobile applications.

It is possible that fun may be on the minds of many in these online sites but there are many who are also looking for companionship, friendship or simply a good chat. And if you are looking out for fun, always remember to stay safe and protected by bringing along your condoms and lubricants. The Gay Men Dating Survival Guide will list more pointers on physical safety while meeting people.

GOING OUT FOR A DRINK

Looking for a drink or getting to meet someone face to face? There are many pubs which are popular among gay men such as DYMK, Lockerroom, Taboo, Tantric Bar, Backstage Bar, Lluvia, Rewind and eBar.

However, do expect a mixed crowd of guys from different age groups in these night spots which are located in the Chinatown area. With increasing social acceptance of LGBT communities, you can also expect to find some straight and gay friendly crowds at these places, keep an open mind and you will find many of your stereotypes on straight people will be challenged.

GOING SAUNAS AND CRUISING

Some men prefer going to men-only saunas where they can be themselves. Many also use saunas as sex venue. These saunas will provide you with condoms and lubricants but you can bring your favourite condoms and lubricants for added pleasure. Although the saunas have lockers for your use, try not to bring anything valuable during these sauna trips. Continue to practice safer sex as you had done in your younger days. At times, there will be temptation to give in to some hot guys but if you want to maintain good health and enjoy sex without worries, use a condom.

If you are cruising in public places, always remember that it is an offence to have sex in the public. Pick up your man and enjoy a pleasurable time in the privacy of your own home or a hotel. As cruising grounds are usually dark and secluded, be alert and identify situations that can place you in physical danger like robbery or assault. If it appears unsafe, leave immediately.



Six important topics for mature gay men have been covered in this guide and we hope it is a good start for you to think positively about maturing as a gay man. Here's the summary:

- ◆ Enjoy your mature life by having a positive outlook in life, building a strong supportive network and setting a vision for the next stage in your life.
- Build or redefine fulfilling relationships with yourself, your family, friends and society by leveraging your experiences in life and gaining a better sense of your needs.
- Understand what are your needs and wants in life and enjoy nurturing relationships with others.
- Make sound and well informed retirement plans so that you are financially stable in your mature life.
- Enjoy fun, healthy and safe sex life by ensuring that you are always protected from HIV/AIDS and STIs.
- Decide what hobby excites you and keeps you going when you are planning to give your life a new direction.

We hope these six points can springboard some thoughts or actions for you. This is the right time to start planning, you can do it alone, with your friends or your partner. If you like, let us know what works for you. Remember, you can enjoy your mature age. There are three stages that we go through in life; we're young, we're middle aged and then we're looking well!



IF YOU NEED

TALK TO SOMEONE

Oogachaga provides a safe and confidential space for mature gay men to talk about their concerns through its Mature Men Project.

- If you need to talk to someone, call us on **Oogachaga Hotline 6226 2002** (operates: Tue to Thu 7 to 10pm
 & Sat 2 to 6pm)
- Or email us through CARE email counselling on www.oogachaga.com/care.
- If you think your concerns will be better advised by a professional, consider our face to face counselling.
 Write to counselling@oogachaga.com for an appointment.
- If you would like to meet and discuss topics closely related to mature gay men, join us at our **Saturday Tea Sessions**, a **5-sessions discussion group program for mature men**. Check our website for more information.
- If you wish to meet and socialise with other mature men, come to our **MMP quarterly social events**. Sign up for the mailing list on www.oogachaga.com/maturemenproject or sms <name>,<age>,<email>mature men project to 9151 6979.

TO...

DO A HIV TEST

Here's a list of clinics that provide anonymous HIV Test in Singapore:

- Action For AIDS Anonymous HIV Testing @ DSC Clinic, 31 Kelantan Lane #01-16 S(200031)
 Tel: 6254 0212 Tues & Wed: 6.30pm to 8pm Sat: 1.30pm to 3.30pm Public holidays: Closed.
- Anteh Dispensary 368 Geylang Road S(389381)
 Tel: 6744 1809
- Cambridge Clinic 333, Kreta Ayer Road, #03-27
 S(080333) Tel: 6327 1252
- Dr Jay Medical Centre 115 Killiney Road S(239553)
 Tel: 6235 5196
- Dr Soh Family Clinic 966 Jurong West Street 93 #01-219 S(640966) Tel: 6791 7735
- M Lam Clinic 739 Geylang Road S(389649)
 Tel: 6748 1949
- Robertson Medical Practice 11 Unity Street #02-07,
 Robertson Walk S(237995) Tel: 6238 7810



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