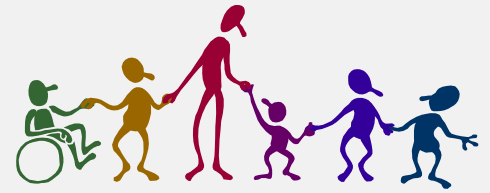


CERTIFIED FAMILY HOME THE AGING PROCESS



Normal Changes That Come With Age

Skin. The skin becomes drier and loses some of its elasticity. The fat under the skin also decreases. As a result, the skin develops folds and wrinkles.

These changes affect the ability of an older person to maintain a constant body temperature. They are more sensitive to heat and cold. Due to its dryness, the skin is more easily irritated from soap, tight clothing, and weather changes. Continuous pressure on certain areas of the skin from lying or sitting in the same position for too long causes serious irritation and bed sores.

Muscles and Bones. Muscle fibers decline with age, and they become less flexible. However, daily activity and exercise can reduce some of this loss. Bones become more porous and less dense. In women, osteoporosis may occur. The padding between the discs of the spine begins to wear away, which can cause back pain. Also, changes in the spine can cause unstable balance, movement and poor posture.

Heart and Circulatory. Blood vessels constrict and lose flexibility, which may lead to blood pressure and circulatory problems. Signs of high blood pressure include headaches, dizziness, fatigue and shortness of breath. Good diet, reduced stress and exercise help keep the heart healthy and blood pressure normal.

Respiratory. Aging can affect a person's capacity for breathing. Muscles for breathing in and out can weaken, the rib cage expands less, and lungs decline in their ability to expel air.

Urinary. Loss of urinary control is a frequent problem, especially for women. Incontinence can range from the discomfort of slight urine loss, to the disability of severe, frequent wetting. In many cases, incontinence can be treated and controlled, if not cured. Prostate problems are common in men over fifty (50).

Sexuality. Except for the reduction of fertility in women, aging causes little change in sexual functioning. Companionship, intimacy, and touch are all-important aspects of sexuality. In caring for an older person, this desire for affection and touch can be achieved by remembering to hug the person. While talking, reach over and hold hands or even give a little shoulder massage or back rub while talking.

Nutrition. Nutritional needs of the elderly are essentially the same as the average adult. A high-fiber diet emphasizing vegetables, fruits, and whole grains are generally recommended. One and a half to two quarts of water are also needed on a daily basis to maintain body temperature and prevent dehydration. Many older persons have difficulty chewing, so softer foods are preferred. Frequently, a decrease in the amount of saliva in the mouth makes swallowing some foods difficult. Poor teeth or poorly fitting dentures can also inhibit proper eating.

Senses. Vision changes are common in older persons. They require more light, and react slower to changes in light and dark. It also may become more difficult to distinguish between colors, especially blues, greens, and purples. Another sensory related age change is hearing. Older individuals may experience inability to hear higher pitched tones or sound may be muffled, as if hearing through cotton. Changes in the sense of taste, smell, and touch are less acute.

Mental. Very few changes in mental ability are caused by aging. Speed of recall and the mastery of new problems seem to be most affected by aging. Slight memory loss is normal as one ages. Significant memory loss is the decline of short-term memory or in the ability to recall recent events.

Emotional Well-Being. The way a person feels about life can be affected by personal and physical losses. Moving from home, death of family and friends, retirement from work, loss of independence and physical functioning all contribute to change and loss in a person's life. Because of multiple losses and stress, older persons may, on occasion, experience depression. Depression can generally be worked out by talking about feelings, helping the person find some area of enjoyment, or professional treatment. Some other common feelings among the elderly include anxiety and loneliness. Again, being able to talk about feelings and understanding that these feelings are a response to real loss can open the way for a different, more positive handling of the loss.

Common Diseases Associated With Aging

Arthritis is basically inflammation of the joints. The most common is degenerative arthritis, or osteoarthritis. This disease involves the degeneration of the connecting cartilage of the joints, displacing it with new bone formation. The result is pain, stiffness upon rising, and creaking joints. You may wish to encourage non-strenuous exercises for an older adult that maintain whatever strength and flexibility remains.

Coronary Artery Disease occurs when the blood supply flowing through the arteries is reduced or blocked. A heart attack occurs when the blood supply is able to get to all areas of the heart. The person may experience a great deal of pain in the center of the chest and pain radiating to the shoulder, arm, and back. A heart attack requires immediate emergency assistance.

Stroke occurs when the blood supply to the brain is reduced or completely shut off. The result of a stroke depends upon the functions of the part of the brain that is damaged and the severity of the damage. Muscle movement, speech, memory, or emotions can be impaired. A care plan for stroke victims needs to be developed for their specific problems, be it speech, paralysis, or emotional control.

Emphysema is caused by the breakdown of air pockets in the lungs. Smoking can cause and/or heighten the effects of emphysema. The lack of oxygen getting to the heart and brain because of emphysema has a major impact on energy level and mental functioning. Lack of oxygen can cause a person to experience memory loss, disorientation, insomnia, and irritability.

Prostate Problems are common in men over 50. Because it surrounds the urethra, an enlarged prostate can make urination difficult. Most problems can be treated effectively. The forms of prostate problems are acute or chronic prostatitis, which are treated with antibiotics, and benign prostate hypertrophy.

Cataracts consist of increasing cloudiness of the eye lens. Cataract removal by surgery is now quite common and almost always successful.

Parkinson's Disease is the most common movement disorder involving the central nervous system. The symptoms include stiffness or muscle rigidity, tremors, a shuffling gait, and difficulty in initiating movement. Slower and monotonous speech, reduced voice volume, drooling, tearing of the eyes, difficulty in swallowing, loss of balance, difficulty in urinating, and a mask-like facial appearance further characterize Parkinson's disease. Usually, the intelligence level of the individual remains normal.

The person with Parkinson's disease should be encouraged to be as physically active as possible. Exercise can help prevent joint contractions, although it will not reverse rigidity. An unhurried environment and sufficient time to complete an activity should be provided for the Parkinson's individual.

Dementia describes a decline in intellectual ability severe enough to interfere with a person's daily functioning. Many diseases can cause the symptoms. Some of the diseases are treatable; others are not.

About 50 percent of the cases of dementia are caused by Alzheimer's disease. In the early stages of Alzheimer's disease, only memory may be noticeably impaired. As the illness progresses, impairments in language and motor abilities are seen. Late in the illness, the person becomes severely impaired, incontinent, and unable to walk.

A treatable type of dementia is acute organic brain syndrome. It comes on rapidly with symptoms such as confusion about time and place, having difficulty remembering things and acting peculiarly. Causes may be medication side effects, malnutrition, internal infections, severe stress, or other diseases. These types of behavioral changes should be reported to the doctor.

Tips for the Hard-of-Hearing in the Home Environment

- Provide amplification devices on telephones.
- Provide a sitting/conversation area away from high background noise (e.g. television, stereo, radio, dishwasher, air conditioner, laundry area). Reduce background noises in your home as much as possible.
- Adjust the TV, stereo, or radio to increase lower tones, if possible. Lower tones are easier for many people who have hearing impairments to hear. Earphone units may be helpful for persons who need the volume louder than is comfortable for others.
- Purchase a TV set, or add-on adaptor, that allows viewing of closed-caption programs.
- Install smoke alarms that signal with flashing lights as well as sound.
- Avoid using fluorescent lights that emit a "buzzing" sound.

Communicating

- **Reduce background noise.** The less confusion and competition for hearing, the better results you will have communicating.
- **Provide adequate light.** Residents need to be able to see your face to read your lips and pick up facial expressions. Minimize glare.
- **Get the person's attention.** Look him or her in the eye. A gentle touch on the arm or hand may draw the person's eyes to you.
- **Face the person.** Be sure there is nothing between you and the other person to block sight or hearing. If possible, be on the same physical level (e.g., sit down if the person is sitting). If the person's hearing is better on one side, speak to that side.

- **Speak clearly.** Don't exaggerate your speech. It distorts your lip movements and does not make words clearer. Do not have anything in your mouth (e.g., food, gum, cigarette).
- **Use a normal tone.** Do not yell or raise your voice. Shouting creates a booming effect that makes it difficult for the person to hear you. A raised voice also could be interpreted as a sign of impatience or irritation and might create a negative emotional climate. If your voice is high-pitched, try to lower the tone.
- **Use different words if you need to repeat.** Using different words with the same meaning may help the listener understand sounds that are unclear.
- **Allow time for response.** Hearing impairments slow reaction time.
- **If the person wears a hearing aid,** be sure he/she is wearing it, it is properly adjusted, and the battery is functioning.