

WHAT TO EXPECT WITH AGING

Definition:

Aging is the natural process of growing older. While the process of aging is inevitable, there are things everyone can do to help stay healthy, active, and feeling younger for longer.

Many different changes occur with aging, affecting several different systems in the body. Here are some examples of those changes, as well as tips on how to handle them.

Musculoskeletal (Mayo Clinic, 2010)

As we age, bone density decreases, increasing the risk for fractures. Bone mass reaches its maximum density between the ages of 25 and 35. After this, bones gradually lose density, weakening their strength and endurance. Muscles, joints, and tendons also lose flexibility and strength, and reflexes become slower.

- ✦ Staying active and using weight training will improve muscle strength and bone density. This can help decrease the risk of fractures and improve flexibility.

Urinary & Gastrointestinal (Mayo Clinic, 2010)

Urinary incontinence is common, especially in women. As muscles throughout the body lose strength and reflexes become slower, it becomes harder for the sphincter muscles and pelvic muscles to prevent urine from coming out when it shouldn't. Constipation can also be common due to the decrease of secretions from the stomach, liver, small intestine and pancreas.

- ✦ Certain exercises can help strengthen pelvic floor and sphincter muscles, improving urinary continence.
- ✦ Dietary modifications and stool softeners can be helpful in reducing constipation.

Hearing & Vision (Mayo Clinic, 2010)

Hearing loss can result from injuries, infections, certain medications, and years of exposure to noise. Vision decline results from the stiffening of eye lenses and pupils becoming less reactive.

- ✦ Yearly vision checks and proper lighting can slow vision decline. If you are experiencing hearing or vision loss, talk to a healthcare professional about different options.

Skin (Mayo Clinic, 2010)

As we age, skin thins and loses elasticity and age spots may begin to appear.

- ✦ Age spots are caused from sun exposure, so always protect skin with sunscreen or UV protectants. There are also topical treatments that a physician can prescribe to help fade the color of age spots.

Oral Health (Mayo Clinic, 2010)

Aging can result in discoloration of the teeth and receding gum lines. Dry mouth can also become a more noticeable problem.

- ✦ Continuing oral hygiene is an important step in staying healthy; always ask your healthcare provider about any questions or concerns you have about your oral health.

Sleep & Metabolism (Mayo Clinic, 2010)

With increasing age, metabolism slows down. Changes in sleep patterns are also common as we age. Sleep needs change throughout a lifetime;



every person is different, but older adults sleep less soundly and wake more frequently during the night.

- ✦ Sound machines, relaxation techniques and having a nighttime routine can sometimes help older adults fall asleep and stay asleep easier.

Sexuality (Mayo Clinic, 2010)

Sexual needs and performance change with age. As women age, the walls of the vagina become less elastic and can narrow; vaginal dryness can also occur with hormonal changes after menopause. This can make sex painful. As men age, impotence becomes more common, and it can become more difficult to get or keep an erection.

- ✦ Sexual performance can sometimes be assisted with medications and lubricants. Your doctor can help address any concerns you may have.

Mood (AOA, 2013)

While some changes the body goes through are a normal part of the aging process, some are not; it is important to be self-aware and know your body. While looking back on your life, nostalgia is normal and sometimes feeling sad or blue is common, but depression is not a normal part of aging. Older adults are at a greater risk for experiencing depression. Symptoms include:

- ✦ Persistent sadness or "empty" mood
- ✦ Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- ✦ Feelings of guilt and worthlessness
- ✦ Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- ✦ Excess fatigue
- ✦ Thoughts of death or suicide
- ✦ Always seek help from your health care provider and ask questions if something seems "off."

Tips for successful aging (Harvard, 2014):

- ✦ Having a good attitude is one of the easiest ways to positively affect your physical and mental health. Studies have shown that people who feel younger than their age have a longer life expectancy and better quality of life.
- ✦ Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is the surest way to keep one's body vibrant and functional.
- ✦ Keep active. Moderate exercise for 120 minutes a week can greatly lower the risk for heart disease, weight gain, and depression.
- ✦ Try new things. Getting involved with new activities helps keep neurological pathways forming and slows cognitive decline.

Resources:

Although there are a lot of changes that come with aging, it isn't something that needs to be feared. Many different resources are available to improve the process of aging, and even make it enjoyable. Some examples include AARP, local community centers, continuing

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