



Area Agency on Aging, PSA 2

Caregiving Series

Aging Myths and Facts

To be seventy years young is sometimes far more cheerful and hopeful than to be forty years old.

Oliver Wendell Holmes

Do we really know what it means to be “old” or do we believe the myths we grew up with and the stereotypes we see portrayed every day in the mass media? Here is some information about normal aging to help you sort myths from facts.

Myth: Most people age 65 and older have moderate or severe memory impairment.

Fact: Although short-term memory declines, long-term memory remains fairly intact.

Myth: Most people age 65 and older have a moderate or severe disability.

Fact: The majority of people 65 and older are not disabled, and the percentage with a disability has decreased from 24% of Americans in 1982 to 21% by 1994.

Myth: If you live long enough, you’ll end up in a nursing home.

Fact: Overall, less than 5% of people 65 and older live in a nursing home.

Myth: You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.

Fact: Older people can learn if given a bit more time. They are more detail oriented and careful.

Myth: Older people have no interest in or capacity for sex.

Fact: Although sexual capacity declines with age, it does not disappear.

Myth: People 65 and older are too old to take part in an exercise or weight lifting program.

Fact: Physical activity at any age can strengthen the heart, lungs, and muscles. Exercise may also lower blood pressure and help slow bone loss.

Myth: If an older person has been a life-long smoker, quitting won’t make a difference late in life.

Fact: It is never too late to quit. Breathing should become easier and blood flow to arms and legs increases when a smoker of any age quits.

Myth: The older a person gets, the less sleep he or she needs.

Fact: In later life, the quality of sleep changes, not total sleep time needed. Waking up tired is not normal and can be helped.

Myth: Older drivers have most of the driving accidents.

Fact: Older drivers have fewer accidents per miles driven and tend to avoid speeding and driving at night. However, people over 70 are more likely to die from crash injuries and should have their vision and hearing checked regularly.

Myth: Older people don't need to worry about getting AIDS.

Fact: About 10% of all people with AIDS in the United States were 50 when first diagnosed. This means older people need to take the same precautions as younger people.

Myth: Heart disease is a man's disease and osteoporosis is a woman's disease.

Fact: Heart disease is the number one killer of both women and men. Women are at special risk for osteoporosis, but one in five Americans with or at risk of developing the disease are men.

Myth: Older people tend to become slow, grumpy, and set in their ways.

Fact: Personality is one of the constants of life. As they age, people are likely to behave as they have since becoming adults. We all experience sensory losses, including changes in vision, hearing, sense of taste, and sense of smell. These changes are gradual, barring disease, and occur at different rates and degrees from person to person. Age related changes do not affect the ability to enjoy life. If personality seems to be changing significantly; sensory changes, depression, or reactions to medication may be the cause.

Some of the data for "Aging Myths and Facts" was drawn from the National Institute of Health Publication No. 03-5431, "What's Your Aging IQ?." Visit <http://www.nia.nih.gov> for more information.



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