

Normal aging or something to be worried about? See this month's newsletter.

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Aging & Psychological Changes

Changes may occur as a normal part of aging. Many of the normal processes of aging can affect people psychologically. Being proactive can assist in easing the effects of psychological changes. Aging persons with an intellectual disability will challenge us to find creative ways for people to continue to do the things they like to do.

Aging is often a time of loss. People may lose family members and friends to death. This can decrease social contact and lead to withdraw. The person experiencing loss needs time and support to grieve the loss. Sometimes well-meaning people do not allow people with disabilities to grieve by sheltering them from the fact of death and from experiencing the rituals that support the grief process. Funerals, wakes and sharing memories of the deceased person help with healing.

Provide support when the grieving person wants to talk about the person they lost. Encourage the person to spend time with existing friends and to go to places where new friendships can develop. A grief support group may benefit some people.

Other losses that people experience as they age relate to vision (decreased peripheral vision, decreased night vision, decreased capacity to distinguish color & reduced lubrication resulting in dry, itchy eyes), relate to hearing (sensitivity to loud noises & difficulty locating sound) and changes in taste and smell. Memory isn't the same. Cognitive change includes changes in the learning process. As people become less physically able to do the things they use to do, they can mourn the loss of independence.

Often older people experience greater emotional balance than younger people contrary to the stereotype of the irritated, withdrawn older person. But the risk for depression can increase during this time due to losses and life changes.

Depression is characterized by persistent sadness, trouble sleeping, loss of self-worth, appetite changes, fatigue and an increased concern with aches and pains. Depression is often untreated in older adults, so seek professional help if you observe symptoms. See the symptoms of a mental health crisis below in our newsletter.

Intellectual capacity is determined by the ability to develop new connections between neurons in the brain. These connections (called dendrites) continue to form throughout a person's lifespan, with their number and length increasing in the early 50s through the late 70s. This proliferation of dendrites gives older adults an advantage in handling complexity. It also explains why 'crystalized abilities' that depend on long-term memory will increase throughout our lives even as more 'fluid abilities' that rely on short-term memory storage while information is processed (such as speed and problem-solving) show declines during aging.

For people interested in staying active, introducing new activities and developing new relationships can be helpful in staying mentally alert and encouraging the

development of dendrites.

For those who seem less interested in going out and doing new things, try to maintain some consistency in routines. Help people to add structure to their days with favorite activities. Some might feel more comfortable selecting a day and time to be a regular at a favorite restaurant instead of trying new places. Becoming a 'regular' can become an important part of the person's routine and quality of life. 'Regulars' will often get to know other 'regulars', thus improving their social life. Some forgetfulness is normal in aging. Some reversible conditions such as lack of sleep, side effects of medication, depression, high stress and other treatable conditions like thyroid problems and vitamin B-12 deficiency can affect memory. Arrange an appointment with a physician, if you notice the symptoms of dementia. See the article that follows on 'Is it Dementia or Old Age?'

You can help a senior to stay sharp with these tips from the Mayo Clinic: stay mentally active, socialize regularly, get organized, focus, eat a healthy diet, daily physical activity and manage chronic illnesses.

Relationships are important at any age. Be there to listen to concerns and fears about the changes that come with aging. Some things you can encourage to keep brains young include: playing games, exploring a new hobby or craft, taking a class, creating a scrapbook, volunteering, working a part-time job, visiting a new place and writing letters. With support and encouragement, many seniors with a developmental disability can enjoy a healthy, thriving late adulthood.

Be attuned to changes. The team needs to assess if changes that are occurring are part of the normal aging process or an indication of a condition needing treatment.

*Information adapted from Creative Aging, SeniorHomes.org and L'Arche Canada
<http://www.aging-and-disability>.*

Is It Dementia Or Old Age?

A list of dementia symptoms may include factors like decreased focus, lack of motivation, or decreased memory. Suffering from these symptoms doesn't always point to dementia. In fact, many dementia symptoms can be a completely normal part of aging, or can be signs of other afflictions like depression. In understanding dementia, one of the most important first steps is learning what distinguishes regular cognitive changes from [dementia](#).

Most people experience mild cognitive changes and memory loss as they begin to move into their 50s. One of the clearest indicators of dementia is the speed of progression. Regular mental decline associated with aging is usually a slow and gradual loss of memory or attention span. Dementia, however, is often characterized by rapid, sudden, and severe changes in memory and cognitive ability.

For dementia symptoms that overlap with normal aging-related cognitive changes, there are distinguishing factors that can help understand whether or not these are regular changes. These can include:

- **Speech skills:** Occasionally forgetting words is usually a sign of normal cognitive changes, while frequent pauses in speech, difficulty understanding speech, or tendency to call things by the wrong name can be a sign of dementia.
- **Memory loss:** Those with regular aging-related memory loss will usually be able to recall specific instances in which their memory has failed, and may complain about increasing forgetfulness. Those with dementia-related memory loss will be unable to recall specific instances of memory loss, and may not acknowledge they have memory loss unless they are prompted or asked.
- **Short-term memory changes:** Significant declines in short-term memory, such as an inability to remember recent conversations or events, are not a normal sign of aging and can indicate dementia.

- **Trouble with familiar tasks:** Normal cognitive decline can cause trouble with directions or with remembering how to get somewhere, but getting lost in familiar, frequently visited locations or forgetting the way home could be signs of dementia.
- **Social skills:** Loss of social skills isn't a normal part of aging - lack of interest in socializing, decreased ability to speak to others, or increased socially inappropriate behavior can be a sign of dementia.

Common Aging Symptoms

Regular cognitive changes associated with aging can include:

- Slower recall speed
- Decreased problem solving abilities
- Slower reaction time
- Decreased attention span
- Decreased concentration
- Decreased learning speed

Signs and symptoms of dementia can vary based on condition type and severity, but usually include both cognitive and psychological changes.

Cognitive Changes for Dementia Patients

- **Disorientation:** A person with dementia becomes lost in familiar places, expresses confusion about the date or time of day, or has difficulty with directions.
- **Memory loss:** Failure to recognize people and faces, in later stages even family members or close loved ones. Dementia patients can also experience decreases in short term memory, such as asking the same questions repeatedly or forgetting recent events and conversations.

- **Problems communicating:** Loss of social skills and lack of interest in socializing, frequently forgetting words, or being unable to follow a conversation.
- **Difficulty with complex tasks:** Difficulty planning or organizing events, paying bills, following recipes, writing letters, or traveling to new locations.
- **Decreased concentration:** Difficulty staying focused and concentrating, decreased ability to learn and memorize new information.
- **Problems with coordination:** Decreased motor functions and coordination, sometimes manifested as trembling, shaking, or difficulty walking.

Psychological Changes for Dementia Patients

- **Changes in mood:** Frequent mood swings, increased sensitivity to change, and increased anxiety and agitation.
- **Personality changes:** Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities and sometimes completely changed [personality and behaviors](#).
- **Hallucinations or paranoia:** In later stages of dementia, sufferers may believe that even close friends or family are dangerous or "out to get them".
- **Decreased reasoning skills:** Neglecting safety, personal hygiene, exercise, or nutrition. May display decreased judgement skills involving money, like careless purchases or giving away large sums of money.
- **Socially inappropriate behavior:** Making rude or explicit sexual comments publicly or to strangers.

From [Dementia.org](https://www.dementia.org) Healthcare Brands

What are the symptoms of a mental health crisis?

From Rescue Mental Health

Mental health crises can often be brought on by stress or other external

pressures. However, they may also simply be the result of a chemical imbalance or a long-term mental health issue which has worsened over time. Here are a few of the warning signs that you may be headed towards a crisis:

- Prolonged and/or frequent episodes of emotional rawness and/or crying.
- Persistent feelings of hopelessness and/or despair.
- Not caring for oneself, including not eating normally or causing self-harm.
- Not caring properly for others, including children and other loved ones.
- Impaired functioning when trying to carry out processes or activities which you once took for granted, including deviations in your sleep routine.
- Irrational or delusional thoughts, including hallucinations.
- Psychotic tendencies which may put you or another party at risk of harm.

When should you call?

If you have a desire or feel a need to harm yourself or another party you should call Rescue as soon as possible. If you see a loved one acting irrationally or dangerously without logical provocation, be sure to call as well. Also, if your mental health situation or the situation of a loved one has degraded to the point where you (or they) no longer possess basic coping or living skills, contact us quickly — we are here to help you 24/7.

Contact Us

3350 Collingwood Blvd.

Toledo, Ohio 43610

Phone: 419.255.9585

Fax: 419.255.2801

Email: info@rescuemhs.com

April Activity Tips

Easter Egg Collage

submitted by Tammura Jones of Easter Seals Turner Family Center

Equipment: Scissors, magazines, glue, and colored construction paper (preferably pastels)

Description: Have participants sit at a table and look through magazines cutting out circles any size. Glue circles onto paper making a collage. Once objects are glued on have the participants cut the paper into the shape of an egg.

Tissue Paper Easter Eggs

Materials: Poster Boards, variety of color tissue paper, scissors and glue.

Description: Cut out a variety of Easter Eggs from the poster board. Have the individuals tear tissue paper and glue onto the poster board eggs. The tissue paper can be glued flat or twisted and glued on. The possibilities are endless.



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Our mailing address is:

Contact us at 419-380-4000 or

seniorcommittee@lucasdd.org

1154 Larc Lane

Toledo, Ohio 43614

Contributions to this Newsletter comes from:

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