



AGING

The graying of America is accelerating – The over 75 age group is the fastest-growing segment of our population. By the year 2030, people age 65 and older will compose **more than 20%** of our population.

Improved medical care, a better diet, and an increasing awareness of the value of physical fitness means that Americans are **living longer and functioning better**. New research into aging has found that with good health care and personal habits, old age doesn't have to rob us of vitality. *Functional age* (a combination of physical, psychological and social factors) *can be far younger than your chronological age*.

Because of the proliferation of new research, many **myths about** the mental, physical and sexual aspects of **aging** are going away. Some of them were:

- **Mental decline is an inevitable part of aging.** In fact, mental decline is more often due to disease than to the normal effects of aging. **Overmedication**, a common but often overlooked problem, can also cause confusion and forgetfulness. Although our brains *shrink* with age (faster in men than in women) and reaction time *slows*, mental abilities can be **maintained and even improved** in some areas.
- **Physical failure is an unavoidable by-product of aging.** As we age, our senses lose some of their sharpness; we tire more easily and our reflexes slow. However, many physical signs of aging are related to **secondary aging** caused by **disease, abuse and disuse**. *These factors are within our control*. With **proper exercise** (30 minutes a day, five days a week), a **good diet** (only 10-20% of calories from fat), and **elimination of bad health habits** such as smoking and drinking, older people can enjoy a health existence well into their seventies or eighties.
- **Sex ends at 65.** The motto for sex and seniors seems to be "use it or lose it". Studies on sexual activity after 65 have concluded that *past sexual enjoyment* and *frequency* are indicators of continued sexual fulfillment. Sexual attitudes are expected to relax as the adults of more liberal generations join the ranks of older Americans.

Today's older people do face some very real problems. Difficulties can arise from

- **Loss of self-worth.** Recent retirees are at high risk as they make this often difficult transition. If their career was the primary source of their identity, they may feel lost or useless without it.
- **Isolation.** As children grow up and move away, and old friends drift apart or die, older people may become socially isolated. Those who can't drive or move about easily are especially vulnerable.
- **Financial worries.** Living on a fixed income can be very stressful and can be exacerbated by anxiety about becoming financially dependent upon children.
- **Health problems.** Past abuse or disuse of our bodies catches up with us in old age, causing health problems that take their toll both physically and emotionally.

These issues can lead to **depression**, a common problem among older people. Although teen suicide receives more publicity, the suicide rate in our population is *highest for those in the 65+ age group*. Support from family, friends or groups helps older people cope with these issues.

For further information or to discuss anything regarding Elder Care, please contact:

HelpPeopleSM
Employee Assistance Program

470-7447
or
1-800-777-6110