



ARBOR TERRACE®
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The Questions You're Afraid to Ask About

Aging & Senior Health

Find out about the physical, mental, and sexual changes that lie ahead and how you can prepare for healthy aging.

COMPLIMENTS OF



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WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON CHANGES TO EXPECT WITH AGING?

When it comes to aging, you can never know for sure what the future will hold. Some 85-year-olds continue to easily swim, dance or play tennis, while their younger brothers or sisters struggle to mow their lawn. Although the aging process varies considerably, there's no denying that you will notice subtle or not-so-subtle differences in your health in your sixties, seventies and beyond. Read on to find out about the physical, mental and sexual changes to look prepare for as you grow older.



GENERAL HEALTH CHANGES

Older adults face a number of health changes, some of which may prove challenging. These include an increased incidence of heart disease, diabetes and gastrointestinal problems, as well as an increase in the risk of certain cancers.

Aging may also weaken the immune system, increasing the risk of infection and the importance of health maintenance. Constipation may increase with age, as may stress incontinence—urine loss when coughing or sneezing—especially for women.

Age-related changes to bones means possible shrinking in size or density and weakness or brittleness in teeth. Without active prevention measures such as yoga or other gentle exercise, seniors are likely to lose strength and flexibility or to begin to experience trouble balancing.

Hydration is particularly important for the elderly, as symptoms of dehydration or urinary tract infections may change and go unnoticed until serious problems arise.

COGNITIVE DECLINE (GRADUAL OR SEVERE)

As you age, it's normal to develop some cognitive decline, including forgetfulness; difficulty focusing, retrieving words and multi-tasking; and decreased problem-solving capacity.

While these things sound frightening, many of them can be mitigated or even avoided with a healthy lifestyle focused on wellness and prevention.



How many people get dementia or Alzheimers disease? How do I tell the difference between dementia and normal forgetfulness?

Worldwide, 47.5 million people have dementia, with 7.7 million new cases added each year. After age 65, the incidence of Alzheimer's disease doubles in frequency every five years.

While most people who are forgetful don't have dementia, research increasingly shows that those with subjective memory complaints may have a greater chance of developing mild cognitive impairment¹.

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The most important indicator that something more than common age-related forgetfulness may be happening is if forgetfulness or other cognitive difficulties such as mood changes are interfering with one's life or causing serious distress. As dementia progresses, people may become lost when driving, forget what year it is or lose the ability to perform complex daily tasks like paying bills. With advanced dementia, memory, language and cognition can become so impaired that bathing, toileting and eating can no longer be performed independently.



ARE AGE-RELATED ILLNESSES PREVENTABLE?

Although you can't do anything about your genes, adopting a healthy lifestyle can significantly cut down your chances of developing age-related diseases and conditions, such as stroke, diabetes, obesity and arthritis.

One of the best ways to stave off age-related conditions is maintaining a healthy diet and adopting a course of exercise that can help fight osteoporosis and decrease your risk for heart disease. If you smoke, quitting is one of the best choices you can make for your health, as is moderating intake of alcohol to one or two drinks per day at maximum.

Finally, caring for your brain is an important part of caring for your body. Look for ways to reduce your stress levels and practice good sleep hygiene in order to make sure that you are well-rested and relaxed.

Remember: A diet and exercise plan should never be undertaken without the advice of your doctor or other medical caregiver.





When and how might my sex life change?

Research shows that both men and women can continue to enjoy active sex lives well into their 70s and 80s, although sex-related hormones — estrogen and progesterone in women, testosterone in men — decline with age, which may cause difficulties for both men and women. If you are experiencing difficulty, speak to your doctor; there are solutions for many age-related sexual changes. It is important to remember that seniors are not exempt from the risk of sexually transmitted infections; when you speak to your doctor, you can also request resources for educating and protecting yourself.

Does everyone experience dietary changes? What do these commonly look like?

If you are in good health and maintain a healthy diet, your style of eating may not have to change much as you age, although you will likely need fewer calories per day — especially if you don't exercise.

You will, however, still need the same amount of nutrients as when you were younger, so maintaining a nutrient-rich diet is key. Common diseases and physical changes of age mean it is more important than ever to have an adequate intake of vitamins and minerals and to follow the dietary recommendations that your doctor may prescribe. Finally, make sure you drink plenty of water, as the ability to notice thirst often decreases with age.



CAN I KEEP EXERCISING? WHAT KIND OF EXERCISE IS SAFE?

You are really never too old to exercise—in fact, physical activity is especially crucial as you grow older, because muscles atrophy faster if they are not used. Strength training can help you lower your risk of developing osteoporosis, while balance exercises can build leg muscles, which helps prevent falls.

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Use gentle stretching in order to increase your range of motion and low-impact endurance exercises, such as walking, cycling or swimming, in order to help maintain good blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

If you haven't been active for a while, consult with your physician and start slowly—say, walking for just five or 10 minutes at a time, several days a week.





Why do some people plan to live in nursing homes? My mother-grandmother lived in a nursing home, and I don't want to live like that. It sounds terrible!

Although nursing homes can be a good choice for people with debilitating conditions, most seniors do not need 24-hour nursing care and find that an independent or assisted-living community is a more appropriate choice. These communities have a homelike feel and offer more social activities than nursing homes. If a senior has dementia, however, a community with a dedicated memory care area may best serve his or her needs.

Most seniors who choose to live in a retirement community have found a place that makes them feel at home and helps set their mind at ease about worries such as safety, security and assistance with tasks like laundry, driving or self-care. It is unlikely to be similar to the nursing home you remember.

I'm worried that I might become a burden to my children. How can I avoid that?

Although you may be healthy and independent your entire life, it is wise to prepare for the day that you can no longer perform certain functions by yourself. Waiting until a health crisis forces you into making a change can cause you and your family enormous stress. Consider downsizing while you are still in good health and begin researching senior living options so that your family is not forced to make a decision for you in a crisis.



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