

Inevitable Aging

Good News. Bad News

By Moira Fordyce MD, MB ChB, FRCPE, AGSF

**“Now which color would be best?”
I mused to myself as I tried to
choose an outfit to wear at our
50th wedding anniversary party.
Suddenly I saw someone looking at
me. Who was this old woman? Oh
no! I was looking at my own
reflection in the mirror!**

After I hit 75, I only started to feel old. I was forced to accept a general slowing up, stiffening as I sat or lay still and fleeting aches and pains. Fortunately nothing that stopped me doing everything I wanted to including my 2 mile walk (minimum) each day.

I have been forced to ponder everything in our physical world eventually wears out including our body. No potion, spell or bargain with god or demon can change this.

No one escapes and for some, the aging process accelerates the older they grow. Others experience step-wise aging with plateaus where they stay the same for a period of time, then slow down a bit more, then hit another plateau.

Aging is a normal part of living and like every stage of life, it brings with it joys and sorrows, triumphs and failures, hopes and regrets. Keep living long enough and you will find that you are old. Aging brings all living things closer to death. The death of an elderly person after a long life, although sad, is the inevitable end to life. We will all go there so a philosophical acceptance of this and preparation for it is wise.

Fortunately, the mind, the spirit, creativity and the various kinds of love, affection and mutual support need not deteriorate. On the contrary, they can continue to grow as long as we are alive and we can use our experience and compassion to console those around us who are hurting either physically, mentally or emotionally.

As we age, we become more fragile than when we were younger which means that:

- All our body systems, including the immune system, function less efficiently
- Minor aches, pains and some degree of stiffness are not uncommon
- Recovery from disease or injury slows and is often incomplete

Drugs of all kinds have a different effect on body and mind; sometimes more powerful, sometimes less so review all medicines regularly with your health professional or pharmacist. Include:

- Prescription
- Over-the-counter, including vitamins and minerals
- Alternative and herbal therapies
- Alcohol and other mind-altering substances
- Make a note of any allergic reactions and medication side-effects

Changes in memory are part of the aging process:

- Retrieving information from our memory files becomes slower in most older adults
- “Tip of the tongue” phenomenon is common – the missing word is close but we have to push to find it
- New skills of all kinds can be learned throughout life but later in life:
 - May take us longer
 - Require more concentration, less interference (quiet versus noisy surroundings)
 - Good light
 - Comfortable surroundings



Creativity

Living long can enhance most kinds of creativity. There are many outstanding examples of older adult geniuses in every field.

- Art – Picasso, Grandma Moses
- Music – Verdi, Pablo Casals playing his cello beautifully at age 93; many orchestral conductors
- Literature – Tolstoy, P. D. James

Studies now available confirm that singing or playing a musical instrument stimulates the brain at any age. Making music with others feeds the brain and spirit as well as providing pleasant social interaction.



Writing down personal life experiences stimulates both creativity and memory. So get busy. Don't focus on what you can't do, focus on what you can do and build on it. This works at any age and will mean that only the shell will grow old.

Got a health question for Dr. Moira Fordyce? Email: moiraf9@gmail.com.