

HEALTH IDENTIFIERS & SYMPTOMS OF ILLNESS

CHANGES with AGE

As you get older, your body will change. Some of the changes you can see. Other changes you might feel. There are also some changes you will not know are happening. In addition to changes in your body, you might also have changes in your memory. Most of these are normal changes with age. These changes are also sometimes called getting older, aging and maturing.



SOME FACTS about CHANGES with AGE

- Due to advances in medicine, people with mental retardation are living a lot longer than ever before.
- While many people with mental retardation age in ways similar to the general population, other factors like genetic disorders may change the aging process. For example:
 - People with Down syndrome are at high risk for Alzheimer's disease, hypothyroidism, heart problems, osteoporosis, sensory disorders and obesity.
 - People with Prader-Willi or Klinefelter's syndrome may be at increased risk for osteoporosis.
 - People with Fragile X syndrome have high rates of certain heart problems, early menopause and visual impairments.
- Woman generally have a higher risk for osteoporosis, early menopause and increased bone fractures.



SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Since many of the signs and symptoms of aging are gradual, it is best to **compare** how someone is today to how they were when they were younger. Some questions to ask the individual (or past caregivers) include:

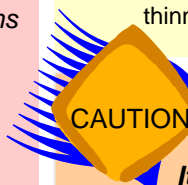
- **Memory:** Do you forget where you put things or lose things more than you used to?
- **Toileting:** Do you sometimes not make it to the bathroom in time and have an accident?
- **Balance and Mobility – changes can result in Falls and Fractures:** Do you fall down more than you used to? Do you keep fracturing your bones?
- **Menopause** for women: Have you not had your period for 12 months?
- **Depression:** Have you been feeling sad a lot lately or not wanted to do the things you used to think were fun?
- **Sleeping disorders:** Have you been sleeping too much or too little?
- **Weight Change** (See Fact Sheet No.# 15)
- **Sensory Changes:** Trouble seeing or hearing, lower sensitivity to pain, increased sensitivity to medications
- **Change in seizure patterns**
- **Changes in Skin – appearance and texture:** skin is thinner, looser, and easily torn and /or bruised



CAUSES

Some factors that can cause more problems as you age include:

- **LIFESTYLE:**
 - **Little or no exercise** can lead to increased fractures or being overweight. Fractures often result in a need for higher care or less independent living. Being overweight has been related to problems such as heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes.
 - **Poor Diet** can lead to being overweight. This can lead to problems like high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease. It can also increase risk of developing osteoporosis
- **MEDICATIONS.** Certain medicines can also effect health. Always ask the doctor about the side effects of prescribed medications.



PREVENTION

It is impossible to stop aging. But, there are many things that improve health as one ages. For instance:

- **Eating well:** Meet with a dietitian and use the Food Guide Pyramid to choose healthy foods
- **Exercising:** Have a doctor or therapist create a special exercise program
- **Keeping the mind active:** Participate in activities that encourage thinking
- **Seeing the doctor** for regular check-ups and for special screenings and examinations.

CHANGES with AGE



WHAT TO DO

- **Plan for the future.** Know where a person wants to be and what they would like to do in the future. Make sure their personal goals and preferences are included in their support plan.
- **Talk.** Encourage them to ask if they have any questions about the changes occurring in their body.
- **Help.** Offer assistance when they can no longer do things to keep healthy and safe. Make sure they understand you are there to help.
- **Stay Healthy.** Exercising and eating well can improve their general health and help prevent illnesses.



WHAT NOT TO DO

- **DO NOT** let the person get discouraged if they can no longer do some of the things they used to do – help them do the best they can. Remind them it is part of the normal aging process.
- **DO NOT** ignore their pain. Tell the doctor.
- **DO NOT** ignore changes that may be making the environment less safe, especially situations that may pose a fire hazard or make falls and hurting oneself more likely. Tell the Case Manager right away and plan ways to deal with the changes.
- **DO NOT** assume that a change in function is just because of age. Tell the doctor.
- **DO NOT** have them continue exercising if they have chest pain or are lightheaded. Have them rest and tell their doctor right away.



DOCUMENT

- Keep a record of how the person is feeling. You can use this to see how they are changing as they age.
- File an Incident Report (if required) and complete other documentation such as writing down a description in the logbook if the person requires emergency medical care.



TELL THE DOCTOR

When you visit the doctor tell him or her if the person is:

- Becoming more forgetful
- Having a few bathroom accidents
- Unsteady on their feet or falls often
- Feeling depressed, sad or anxious
- Thinking/Talking about wanting to die or hurt oneself
- Having trouble sleeping, or sleeping too much
- Having trouble seeing or hearing
- Gaining or losing weight without trying
- Pale and has cold, sweaty skin
- Very anxious that something bad is about to happen
- Having seizures that are different than usual
- Women - period seems different or is missing



EMERGENCY

CALL 911 and Immediately seek medical care if they have:

- Pressure or pain in the center of the chest, and/or it spreads to the jaw, shoulders, neck, back or arms and last for more than a few minutes
- Chest discomfort with lightheadedness, fainting, sweating, nausea or shortness of breath
- Sudden and very painful headache, often with a decrease of vision in one eye
- Difficulty speaking or understanding
- Weakness or numbness on one side of the body, face, arm or leg



TO LEARN MORE - Go to this website:

<http://www.uic.edu/orgs/rrtcamr/aboutus.htm>