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# 10 Common Misconceptions About Aging

Many people make assumptions about aging, what it is like to grow “old,” and how older age will affect them. But as we get older, it is important to understand the positive aspects of aging as well as its challenges. Research has shown that most individuals can help preserve their health and mobility as they age by adopting or continuing healthy habits and lifestyle choices. Read on to learn about 10 common misconceptions related to aging and older adults.

## 1. Are depression and loneliness normal in older adults?

Depression is not a normal part of aging. However, as people age, some may find themselves feeling [isolated](#) and alone. This can lead to feelings of depression, anxiety, and sadness. Persistent feelings of depression and loneliness can lead to a decline in physical and mental functioning. These feelings are not normal and shouldn't be treated as such.

Growing older can have many emotional benefits, such as long-lasting relationships with friends and family and a lifetime of memories to share with loved ones. In fact, some [studies](#) show that older adults are less likely to experience depression than young adults. However, it's important to know that older adults with depression may have less obvious symptoms or be less likely to discuss their feelings. Depression is a common and potentially serious mood disorder, but there are treatments that are effective for most people.

Learn more about [depression and older adults](#) and get [tips for staying connected](#).

### Get Immediate Help

If you are thinking about harming yourself, tell someone immediately who can help.

- Do not isolate yourself.
- Call 988 or go directly to a hospital emergency room.
- Call your doctor or ask a friend or family member to help you.

Call or text the 24-hour [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#): 988 or 800-273-TALK (800-273-8255). For TTY users, use your preferred relay service or dial 711, then 988.

## 2. Do people need less sleep as they get older?

Older adults need the same amount of sleep as other adults: seven to nine hours each night. However, the quality and quantity of sleep can decline with age. Older adults may find themselves having a harder time falling asleep and

staying asleep. Getting enough sleep can help most people stay healthy and alert. Adequate sleep can also help reduce the risk of falls, improve overall mental well-being, and have many other benefits.

Learn more about the importance of getting a [good night's sleep](#).

### 3. Can older adults still learn new things?

Yes! Older adults still have the ability to learn something new, create new memories, and improve their performance in a variety of skills. While aging does often come with changes in thinking, many [cognitive changes are positive](#), such as having more knowledge and insight from a lifetime of experiences. Trying and learning new skills may even improve cognitive abilities. For example, [one study](#) found that older adults who learned quilting or digital photography had improved memory. Seeking out new social connections with others and engaging in [social activities](#), such as a dance class or book club, can keep your brain active and may also boost your [cognitive health](#).

Learn more about [cognitive health and older adults](#).

### 4. Is it inevitable that older people will develop dementia?

No, dementia is not a normal part of aging. Although the risk of [dementia](#) increases as people grow older, it is not inevitable, and many people live into their 90s and beyond without the significant declines in thinking and behavior that characterize dementia. About one-third of people over age 85 develop some form of dementia, meaning that about two-thirds do not. Occasionally forgetting an appointment or losing your keys are typical signs of [mild forgetfulness](#), which is a common part of normal aging. Nevertheless, [talk with a doctor](#) if you have concerns about your memory and thinking, or notice changes in your behavior and personality. These problems can have a range of different causes, some of which are treatable or reversible. Finding the cause is important for determining best next steps.



## Is Forgetfulness Normal or Not?



Learn more about [what's normal forgetfulness and what's not](#).

## 5. Should older adults avoid exercise and physical activity so they don't get injured?

Exercise and physical activity can be good for a person's health at any age! As people age, they may think exercise could do more harm than good, especially if they have a chronic condition. However, studies show that most people have a lot more to gain by being active — and a lot to lose by sitting too much. Often, being sedentary or inactive is more to blame than age when older adults lose the ability to do things on their own.

Almost anyone, at any age and with most health conditions, can participate in some type of exercise or physical activity. In fact, exercise and physical activity may help manage some [chronic conditions](#). Staying active can be great for a person's [mental](#) and [physical health](#). [Tai Chi](#) and similar mind-body movement practices have been shown to improve balance and stability in older adults, which can help maintain independence and prevent falls. [Resistance training](#), such as using exercise bands, is also an effective way to build muscle and reduce the risk of falling.

## The Emotional Benefits of Exercise

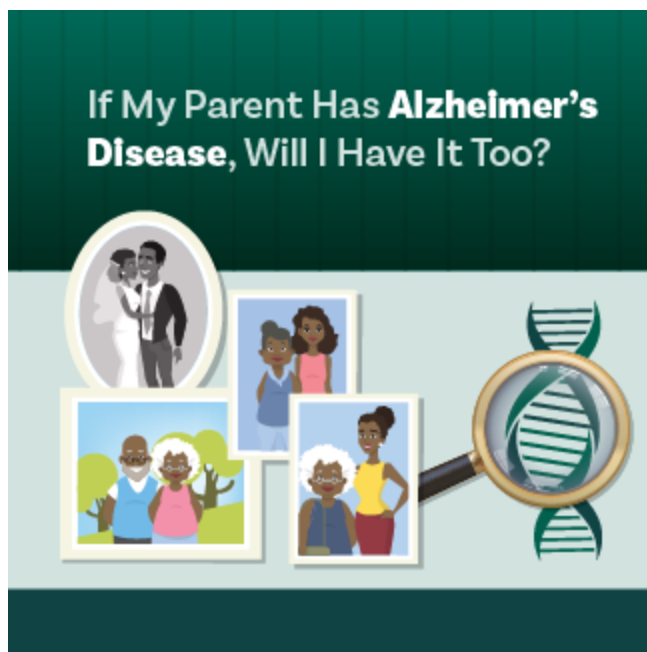


Learn more about how [exercise and physical activity](#) can improve your health.

### 6. If a family member has Alzheimer's disease, will I develop it, too?

A person's chance of developing Alzheimer's disease may be higher if they have a family history of dementia because some genetic variants are known to increase risk. However, having a parent or other close family member with Alzheimer's does not necessarily mean that a person will develop the disease. Learn about your own unique family health history and [talk with your doctor](#) about any concerns.

In most cases, a person's risk of Alzheimer's is influenced by a combination of factors, including the effects of multiple genes. Environmental, lifestyle, and health factors — such as hypertension, exercise, diet, exposure to pollutants, and smoking — can also affect a person's risk. While inherited genes are beyond control, people can take steps to stay healthy as they age, such as



getting regular exercise, managing high blood pressure, and not smoking.

Learn more about [Alzheimer's genetics](#) and what we know about [preventing Alzheimer's](#).

[Share this infographic](#) and help spread the word about Alzheimer's genetics.

## 7. Now that I'm older, will I have to give up driving?

Not necessarily. Physical and cognitive changes can occur with age that may affect a person's ability to drive. These may include slower reactions, diminished vision or hearing, and reduced strength or mobility. However, not all people experience these changes and may still be safe behind the wheel in their later years. As the U.S. population ages, the number of licensed older adults on the road will continue to increase. In 2020, there were [48 million licensed drivers over the age of 65](#), a 68% increase from 2000. The question of when it is time to limit or stop driving should not be about age; rather, it should be about one's ability to drive safely. This article can help determine if you or a loved one needs to [limit or stop driving](#). [Talk with your doctor](#) about any health and driving concerns.

Learn more about [driving safety and older adults](#).

## 8. Is osteoporosis only a problem for women?

No, although osteoporosis — a condition that makes bones more fragile and prone to breaking — is more common in women, this disease also affects and could be underdiagnosed in men. While men may not be as likely to have osteoporosis because they start with higher bone density than women, one in five men over the age of 50 will have an osteoporosis-related fracture. By age 65 or 70, men and women lose bone mass at the same rate.

Many of the factors that put men at risk are the same as those for women, including family history, insufficient calcium or vitamin D, and too little weight-bearing exercise. Low levels of testosterone, too much [alcohol](#), taking certain drugs, and smoking are other risk factors.

Learn more about [osteoporosis](#) and how to maintain bone health as you age.

## 9. Am I "too old" to quit smoking?

No matter how old you are or how long you have been smoking, quitting at any time improves your health. Benefits to quitting may include fewer illnesses such as colds and the flu, breathing more easily, and having more energy.

Some of the benefits of quitting are almost immediate. Within a few hours, the carbon monoxide level in your blood begins to decline and, in a few weeks, circulation improves and lung function increases. Over time, quitting can also lower heart rate and [blood pressure](#). Additionally, quitting smoking lowers the risk of cancer, heart attack, [stroke](#), and lung disease. Quitting will also reduce risks related to secondhand smoke exposure for other family members or caregivers in the home. It is never too late to reap the benefits of quitting smoking and set a healthy example for your family and friends.



Learn more about how to [quit smoking and where to find help](#).

## 10. If my blood pressure goes down, can I stop taking my medication?

High blood pressure is a very common problem in older adults — especially those in their 80s and 90s — and can lead to serious health problems if not treated properly. If you take blood pressure medicine and your blood pressure goes down, it means your medicine is working. However, it is very important to continue treatment long-term. If you stop taking your medicine, your blood pressure could rise again, increasing the risk for health problems such as stroke and kidney disease. Make sure to have your blood pressure checked regularly and work with your doctor to help keep it under control.

Learn more about [high blood pressure](#) and how to help control it.

### You may also be interested in

- Exploring [myths about Alzheimer's](#)
- Learning about [healthy aging](#)
- Reading information on [cognitive health and older adults](#)

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## For more information about aging

### National Cancer Institute

800-422-6237

[cancergovstaff@mail.nih.gov](mailto:cancergovstaff@mail.nih.gov)

[www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

### National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health

888-644-6226

866-464-3615 (TTY)

[info@nccih.nih.gov](mailto:info@nccih.nih.gov)

[www.nccih.nih.gov](http://www.nccih.nih.gov)

### National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

301-592-8573

[nhlbiinfo@nhlbi.nih.gov](mailto:nhlbiinfo@nhlbi.nih.gov)

[www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

**National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases**

877-226-4267

301-565-2966 (TTY)

[niamsinfo@mail.nih.gov](mailto:niamsinfo@mail.nih.gov)[www.niams.nih.gov](http://www.niams.nih.gov)**National Institute of Mental Health**

866-615-6464

866-415-8051 (TTY)

[nimhinfo@nih.gov](mailto:nimhinfo@nih.gov)[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)**988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**

988 or 800-273-8255 (24 hours a day)

711 then 988 or 800-799-4889 (TTY)

<https://988lifeline.org>**Federal Highway Administration**[www.safety.fhwa.dot.gov/older\\_users](http://www.safety.fhwa.dot.gov/older_users)**AARP**

888-687-2277

877-434-7598 (TTY)

[member@aarp.org](mailto:member@aarp.org)[www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)**American Cancer Society**

800-227-2345 (24 hours)

866-228-4327 (TTY)

[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

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