

MATURE living



Three misconceptions about cognitive aging

Cognitive aging refers to the changes a person undergoes in their ability to think, sense and reason as they get older. It seems simple enough, but in fact, it's a subject that's rife with misconceptions. Here are three of them:

1. COGNITIVE AGING IS SYNONYMOUS WITH COGNITIVE DECLINE

Health professionals judge that it's incorrect to speak of a decline, given that cognitive aging is a natural process and one characterized by enormous variability. It's true that a person's memory tends to become less sharp as they age and their mental processes tend to slow. However, this isn't the same thing as a change in intelligence. In fact, there's no reason cognitive aging should interfere with a person continuing to learn new skills as they get older.

2. COGNITIVE AGING IS CONNECTED TO ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

While the signs of cognitive aging resemble the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease to some degree, the two should not be confused. Alzheimer's is a neurodegenerative disease characterized by severe declines in cognitive capabilities. Cognitive aging, on the other hand, isn't a disease but a natural part of getting older; the changes in cognitive ability to which it refers vary and are gradual.

3. NOTHING CAN BE DONE ABOUT AGE-RELATED COGNITIVE CHANGES.

Cognitive aging may be a natural process, but the extent to which one's ability to think, sense and reason will change over the years can be controlled. You can be mental-

ly sharp at any age. To attend to your cognitive health, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine recommends the following:

- **Be physically active.** Physical health goes hand-in-hand with mental health.



- **Be socially and intellectually active.** Seek out new experiences and new learning opportunities.

- **Make sure you're sleeping well.** The quality of your sleep directly impacts your cognitive functioning. Consult a health professional if you're having trouble sleeping.

- **Manage your medications.** Certain medications can negatively affect one's cognitive functions.

Consult with your doctor if you're concerned about the effect of your medications, or if you want to learn more about maintaining your cognitive health.

Getting a hearing aid: what to expect

On average, it takes people who notice a change in their hearing five to seven years to do something about it. This is unfortunate, as hearing loss can lead to social withdrawal, depression, cognitive decline and decreased personal safety. Wearing a hearing aid, however, can drastically improve a person's ability to hear.

WHO TREATS HEARING LOSS?

There are two types of health professionals who specialize in hearing loss: audiologists and ear, nose and throat (ENT) doctors (also called otolaryngologists).

Since hearing loss is frequently a natural part of aging, seeing an audiologist instead of an ENT doctor is generally more appropriate for seniors. Audiologists administer hearing tests and fit patients for hearing aids.

However, if you have concerns that a medical condition is behind your hearing loss, a visit to the ENT doctor is the recommended first step. Only a physician can perform a medical exam and determine whether hearing loss is medically or surgically correctable.

Note that both licensed physicians and ENT doctors can administer hearing tests and recommend hearing aids. However, audiologists are more experienced in this domain and generally

provide superior testing, consultations and fittings.

GETTING A HEARING AID FROM AN AUDIOLOGIST

A hearing test conducted by an audiologist typically takes 30 to 40 minutes. Afterwards, depending on your test results, he or she will recommend the hearing aid that's best suited to your needs and lifestyle. Your hearing aid will be tailor made to fit your ear.

Usually, your audiologist will have you come in for one or more follow-up appointments to evaluate if adjustments to the hearing aid need to be made.

Hearing loss can have a number of negative consequences but wearing a hearing aid can help. If you or a loved one is experiencing hearing loss, don't wait to visit your doctor or audiologist.



Guarding against malnutrition

Seniors are at risk for malnutrition. Though their need for nutrients remains largely the same as when they were younger, their need for energy, and therefore their appetite, decreases with age. Here are a few things seniors can do to fend off malnutrition.

- **Have regular weigh-ins.**

Weight gain or loss can be difficult to notice, as it typically happens gradually. Seniors should make a habit of weighing themselves at least once a month. Any weight loss of more than five per cent of their body weight during a period of six months or less needs attention.

- **Watch for red flags.** Besides weight loss, malnutrition can cause tiredness and irritability, slow healing of wounds and the feeling of always being cold.

- **Understand the side effects of medications.** Many drugs affect appetite, digestion and nutrient absorption.

Remedies for malnutrition include exercising regularly to stimulate the appetite, adding more herbs and spices to meals to enhance flavour and taking supplements (if recommended by a doctor).



If you think you or a loved one is suffering from malnutrition, see a physician right away. Malnutrition has a number of serious consequences, including a weakened immune system (increasing the possibility for contracting infections) and a heightened risk for falling and getting fractures due to muscle weakness and decreased bone mass. A doctor will help you form an appropriate care plan to get your health back on track.

A satisfying sex life is possible at any age

Your sexuality doesn't come with an expiration date, and in fact, many older people enjoy having an active and fulfilling sex life. To join the ranks of sexually satisfied seniors, you already have the tools you need, including the following:

- **You know yourself.** A lifetime of sexual experimentation has probably taught you what you like and what you don't like in bed. Don't be shy to share this information with your partner to ensure that both of you have a good time.

- **You've got time.** Retired (or semi-retired) life leaves you more time for leisure activities. Dedicating more energy into your sex life will make it more pleasurable and rewarding. If you're not in a relationship, take the time to peruse online dating websites dedicated to older adults in your area.

- **You're desirable.** Your body may have changed over the years, but you're as desirable as ever. Your eyes, smile and personality are fabulous. Take pride in your appearance by pampering your skin, eating well and staying active.

- **You have resources.** If you need medical assistance to have a more satisfying sex life, there are many health professionals who can help. A sexologist, pharmacist or doctor can help you decide if you'd benefit from sex therapy, hormone treatments or a medication like Viagra or Cialis.

With a little self-confidence and a great partner, you're sure to have a great time between the sheets. A healthy sex life is good for your health and mental well-being, no matter what your age.



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Devilled eggs with avocado

INGREDIENTS
(Makes 24 hours d'oeuvres)

- 12 large eggs
- 4 slices of bacon
- 2 ripe avocados
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 1 tablespoon Tabasco or Sriracha sauce
- 1 teaspoon salt
- A few sprigs of fresh Italian parsley

PREPARATION

1. Place the eggs in a large casserole, cover with cold water and boil over high heat for 12 minutes.
2. While the eggs are boiling, prepare a large bowl of very cold water — make sure to add ice!
3. Cook bacon in the microwave until crispy, and chop into thick pieces.
4. After 12 minutes, plunge eggs in the cold water. Once nice and cold, peel off the shell, cut the eggs in half (lengthwise) and remove the yolks.
5. Mix the egg yolks, peeled avocados, lime juice, hot sauce and salt in a food processor until smooth and creamy.
6. Use a small spoon or pastry bag to stuff the egg halves. You should have enough stuffing to make 24 nice mounds. Finish by topping with bacon bits and Italian parsley.

Note: You can keep leftovers in the fridge for up to three days, provided they are well covered with plastic wrap.

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