

# Ever wonder what happens to the senses as aging works on them?

When does aging begin? Aging is highly individualized. There is no single measure of how "old" a person is. Aging proceeds at different rates in different people and at various rates in various systems in the same person. What are some normal aging changes?

**Vision:** A common misconception is that all old people suffer from bad vision. Studies indicate this is not true. A surprisingly high percentage of older people have good-to-adequate vision. But changes do occur in the eye as you age, usually starting in the late 30s and early 40s. Typically, you have to hold the paper farther away to read it. Some of the ability of the lens of the eye to change its shape to accommodate distance is lost with age.

The size of the pupils grows smaller with age, so less light is let into the retina. Focusing becomes less accurate. Sensitivity to glare increases. Lateral (side) vision decreases with age. It is more difficult to make adaptations to darkness.

The ability to see colors changes with age. As you grow older, the lens of the eyes yellow. Trouble can occur with the blue end of the light spectrum. An elderly person may have trouble discriminating between shades of blues and greens. Red and yellow pills, for example are easier for an elderly person to see than blue or blue green.

**Hearing:** When there is hearing loss it is usually in the high frequency range resulting in the inability to hear high pitched

sounds. Older people will more likely hear sounds spoken in a low voice.

A common way to compensate for hearing trouble is to increase volume. But what is comfortable for people with hearing loss is very uncomfortable for others who have normal hearing. An auditory problem common to aging is the inability to understand the message because of a high level of background noise. As age increases, less and less background noise is required for older people to experience this inability to hear. For example, for older people, television tends to interfere with hearing when they are trying to verbally communicate.

The more serious effect of hearing loss is withdrawal from

others. For some reason, it seems eyeglasses are accepted much more readily than hearing aids.

**Taste and Smell:** There is some loss of taste buds with aging, though not much until age 50 and not a very large change until after 70. One problem for older people is eating and preparing food alone. This can be an emotional problem that affects diet more than taste buds. Meals-on-Wheels and other group programs that create a setting for eating with others for social interaction have been developed to correct this problem. Also, a limited budget keeps some older people from eating well at home.

**Pain and Sense of Touch:** With age, the skin is not as sensitive as in youth. The skin be-

comes less taut. There is loss of elasticity, pigmentary changes, and loss of tissue immediately below the skin. Older people need to be alert to the fact they are not as sensitive to heating pads or hot water bottles as they once were and they can harm the skin before realizing there is damage. There is also increased difficulty in maintaining normal temperature and the tendency to develop bruises or skin sores.

Several things can help older people keep healthier skin: avoiding extreme exposure to the sun, as sunlight tends to accelerate skin aging; moisturizing helps make the skin more comfortable; and exercising brings more oxygen to the tissues.

*Source: Lou Isbell, Missouri University Extension.*

# Parents can help girls and young women get the exercise they need

While great strides have been made in the advancement of women's sports, it is still an uphill battle when it comes to the basic fitness level of girls and young women today. Unfortunately, when you study recent statistics what begins in childhood perpetuates in adulthood.

The amount of leisure-time physical activity girls get drops by more than 80 percent between elementary school and late adolescence, according to a study conducted at the University of Pittsburgh. Adolescent girls also place less value on participating in physical ac-

tivity than their male peers, and only 25 percent of them participate in daily physical education at school.

It's not surprising, then, to learn that women are at a disproportionate risk for physical inactivity, as compared to men, and only 20 percent of women engage in regular vigorous activity. Trends that begin in childhood bear negative fruit in adulthood.

Yet, fit children are happier children. A survey of more than 7,600 U.S. children revealed a "clear link between a student's self image and a healthy lifestyle," said Jodi Prohofsky,

vice president at CIGNA Behavioral Health, which conducted the Be Healthy...Be Fit survey.

Active children have better self-esteem, are less prone to eating disorders and poor body image, have more confidence and are better at developing leadership skills. So why isn't more being done to encourage girls and young women to stay active?

The rise in women's sports has been a positive influence, but not all girls are cut out for competition. More needs to be done to introduce them to several fitness options. According to researchers at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, "If girls are to have a chance to become active for a lifetime,

more effort is needed to teach about and provide experience with a wide array of physical activity possibilities."

Parents are in a wonderful position to help their daughters discover the joys and rewards of exercise! Here's what parents can do:

Get active with your girls! Go for walks and bike rides. Shoot some hoops. Take them to a dance exercise class. Buy a yoga video or DVD and do it together at home. Be creative and encourage your daughters to try it all.

Introduce them to a variety of activities, including non-traditional options such as rock climbing, martial arts or African tribal dancing. Mix competitive

and non-competitive endeavors and see what motivates your child.

Be a role model. If you aren't active yourself, don't expect your child to be active. A fit lifestyle is one of the greatest gifts you can give your children – and yourself!

Lobby your schools and school districts for more physical education classes. Encourage school administrators to be active partners in educating children about the lifelong benefits of regular physical activity.

Turn off the television and computer, or at least ration the time spent in front of the screen.

Help your child set a fitness goal. Just be sure that it is positive, reasonable and activity focused. For example, they can

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