Are You Aging Well?

Understand the Variety of Factors Influencing the Aging Experience
Objectives

- Understand the meaning of “aging well”
- Describe the factors or experiences that are barriers to aging well
- Identify strategies for improving wholistic approaches to aging well in the 21st century
What comes to mind when you think of the words “age/aging/old”?

• Talk for 1-2 minutes in groups of 2 or 3
• Write thoughts on sticky notes
• Place sticky notes on flipchart paper
What is aging?

• Time

• Example of aging

• Medical conditions are not aging
  – Causes: pathogen, internal dysfunction, accident or injury

• Relationship between aging and disease/disability
  – Increased risk: Ex: Minnesota nun study
What does “aging well” mean?

Aging well can be defined in numerous ways. Here is one definition:

“Promoting health and preventing disease and disability, along with high physical and psychological functioning and social engagement”
Why the increased attention to aging well?

• Increase in human lifespan
• Increase in the aging population
Life expectancy globally and by world regions since 1770

Source: Life expectancy – James Riley for data 1990 and earlier; WHO and World Bank for later data (by Max Roser)
OurWorldInData.org/life-expectancy/ • CC BY-SA
Life expectancy, 2015

Shown is period life expectancy at birth. This corresponds to an estimate of the average number of years a newborn infant would live if prevailing patterns of mortality at the time of its birth were to stay the same throughout its life.

Source: Clio-Infra estimates until 1949; UN Population Division from 1950 to 2015
OurWorldInData.org/life-expectancy-how-is-it-calculated-and-how-should-it-be-interpreted/ • CC BY-SA
Figure 1.

Centenarians and Their Proportion of Total Population: 1980 to 2010
(For information on confidentiality protection, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/doc/sf1.pdf)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Proportion (per 10,000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>32,194</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>37,306</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>50,454</td>
<td>1.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>53,364</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

US Centenarians: 2010

Number

Per 10,000 state population

Figure 8. 
Centenarians: 2010
(For information on confidentiality protection, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/doc/441.pdf)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census Summary File 1.
Whole Person Wellness
Interconnectedness

• Integration of multiple dimensions
• Lifestyle behaviors and choices are integrated
• Strong association between healthy lifestyles, prevention, and longevity
Barriers to aging well

- Attitude/stereotypes
- Health Changes (acute or chronic)
- Financial Deficits
- Physical/Mental Decline
- Changes in Environment (safety, residence, neighborhood, technology)
- Losses (loss of control)
Ageism

• Assumption that age predicts individual traits

• Aging Stereotypes
  – Memory loss
  – Economic drain
  – Grumpy
  – Depressed/lonely
  – Frail
  – Bored
Impact of ageism

• Aging self-perception predicts
  – Health outcomes
  – Behavioral intervention adoption
Impact of ageism

• Medical professionals
  – Under-treatment
  – Overtreatment
  – Communication
Strategies to mitigate ageism

- Recognize personal biases
- Meaningful subsets of older people
- Correct inaccurate beliefs
- Communication
Strategies to support aging well

• Major aging studies
• Centenarians
• Selected research findings
• Livable communities
• Individual differences
Findings from major aging studies

- Harvard Study of Adult Development – longest, most comprehensive examination of aging ever conducted.
  - Results were not exactly what investigators anticipated
  - Longevity of your parents, quality of your childhood and your cholesterol levels were not very influential in predicting a longer, healthier life.
Findings: predictors of aging well

• Avoiding cigarettes
• Good adjustment or coping skills
• Absence of alcohol abuse
• Keeping a healthy weight
• Exercising regularly
• Maintaining strong social relationships
• Pursuing education
Making the most of the aging process:

• Keep learning something new
• Maintain a playful spirit
• Find younger friends as you lose older ones
• Learn to adapt to changes
Set your own course to aging well…

• Our genes may influence our longevity but many other factors within our control can predict having a happy and healthy life.
• It is never too late to make changes to our present lifestyle.
• Everyone can make lifestyle changes to move them in the direction of aging well.
3 actions that positively influence the aging process & enhance quality of life:
• Avoid disease and disability
• Maintain high cognitive & physical function
• Stay involved with life and living
Selected findings – aging research

- **Physical factors**: exercise, better self-rated health, fewer chronic medical conditions, nutrition, weight
- **Psychological factors**: low rates of depression and high rates of resilience, sense of purpose in life, positive outlook
- **Social factors**: happy marriage, social support, and social contacts, enjoying favorite activities
Secrets from centenarians

Blue Zones - The nine lessons:
1. Move naturally.
2. Know your purpose.
4. Eat less.
5. Eat less meat
6. Drink in moderation.
7. Have faith.
8. Power of love.

https://www.bluezones.com/
AARP Livable Communities

The AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities
and work within
The 8 Domains of Livability
help communities become great for people of all ages

1. Outdoor Spaces and Buildings
2. Transportation
3. Housing
4. Social Participation
5. Respect and Social Inclusion
6. Civic Participation and Employment
7. Communication and Information
8. Community and Health Services

https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/
Aging is an individual experience

• Subsets of older adults
  – Question the use of chronological age – biological age is a better determinant
  – Understand their motivations and desires
    • Examples: What would a good day look like for you? What is important in your life? What are your goals? What really matters to you?
  – Remember that aging embodies both growth and decline
Aging Well
Action Steps to Enhance Aging Well

• What can you do in your work with older adults to address barriers to aging well?
• What strategies can you incorporate into your work with older adults that will promote aging well?
• Write down 2-3 ideas on a sticky note and share with others at your table.
Thank You!

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