



The Senior Care Client

Aging is a normal part of living that affects everyone physically, socially and psychologically. As a person matures, there are structural and functional changes to the human body, which are both normal and anticipated. The physical changes in the body are a result of changes in cell structure, chemical activity and hormone production. Psychological changes impact behavior, thinking, functioning and personality.

After retirement, these changes impact social interactions, roles and status. They also have a bearing on leisure time and recreational activities. Tagged to the physical and psychological facets are sociological, health and economic aspects, which can all influence how and how well an individual travels along the aging highway.



The Senior Care Client

While growing older is inevitable, the rate at which people age varies greatly from person to person, as does their ability to cope. Some factors that influence how an individual copes with aging include:

- **Social support systems**
- **Status of health**
- **Financial resources**
- **Education**
- **Life experiences**



Biological Aging

This type of aging revolves around the physiological changes that occur throughout the various systems in the body. It is theorized that biological aging results from:

- **Wear and tear on the body**
- **Chemical changes in the body**
- **Inability to fight disease**
- **Changes in the structure of skin and collagen**
- **Changes in cells and tissues**



Social Aging

Social Aging refers to age-related changes in an individual or in society wherein certain expectations of pre-determined behavior are imposed. This includes problems such as multiple losses, retirement and age discrimination.



Psychological Aging

Psychological Aging refers to changes in behavior and mental processes, which can impact a person's ability to adapt, adjust and cope with changes. Other conditions that can have an impact are learning abilities, depression and dementias.



Outward Signs of Aging

- Skin wrinkling and loss of elasticity due to:
 - Loss of underlying fat layers and oil
 - Inadequate nutrition
 - Sun exposure
 - Heredity
 - Hormone changes



Outward Signs of Aging

- Reduced ability to perspire due to sweat glands wasting away
- Development of “age spots” due to deposits of melanin pigment
- Hair turns gray due to loss of pigment
- Nails become thicker due to reduced blood flow



Aging Effects on the Body

Body System	Changes	Consequences
Cardiovascular System	Reduced blood flow to the body	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduced stamina• Slower healing rate• Hypertension• Increased chance of stroke, heart attack or congestive heart failure
Respiratory System	Decreased oxygen intake	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decreased stamina• Shortness of breath• Anxiety
Musculature System	Loss of muscle tone and strength	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduced ability to breathe deeply• Constipation• Bladder incontinence
Nervous System	Shrinking of the brain	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduced response and coordination time• Changes in sleeping pattern



Aging Effects on the Body

Body System	Changes	Consequences
Skeletal System	Reduced bone density due to calcium loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduction in height• Increased risk of fractures• Changes in posture and rigidity
Gastrointestinal System	Reduction in production of hydrochloric acid and saliva	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impaired swallowing• Delayed emptying of stomach• Gastrointestinal distress
Endocrine System	Decrease in metabolic rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduced stamina• Food is not absorbed well• Greater susceptibility to drug toxicity
Urinary System	Kidney decreases in efficiency; bladder holds less urine and fails to empty completely	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased need to urinate• Reduce fluid intake and leads to dehydration and constipation issues



Sensory Changes

Sense	Changes	Consequences
Vision	Thickening and yellowing of eye lens	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Takes longer to focus• Decreased depth perception• Increased sensitivity to glare
Hearing	Decreased sensitivity to high frequency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some hearing loss• Socially disabling
Taste and Smell	Reduction in number of taste buds and decline sense of smell	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decreased interest in food• Reduced awareness of body odor, smoke, spoiled foods and hazardous fumes
Skin Sensitivity	Reduced sense of touch	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased chance of unknowingly causing self injury
Balance and Gait	Decreased ability to maintain balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fall risk



Cognitive Changes

Factor	Changes	Consequences
Intelligence	Reduced efficiency of nerve transmission	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Slower information processing• Inaccurate perceptions• Reduced capacity to process new information
Learning and Memory	Increase in memory problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduced ability to recall recent events• Reduced ability to retrieve existing information• Reduced ability to accumulate new information



Personality Changes

Factor	Changes	Consequences
Personal Suitability	Personality traits change very little with age	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An individual is considered “ageless” in terms of personal suitability
Personality Change	Shifts in personality as the individual becomes preoccupied with his/her inner life	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tendency to be less impulsive and more cautious• Tend to be “more themselves” as interaction styles become more individualized



Basic Needs of Seniors

- **Physiological** – consists of the need for oxygen, food, water and a relatively constant body temperature.
- **Safety** – shelter and protection from harm...adults have little awareness of their safety needs unless that safety is threatened by emergency or disorganization.
- **Love, Affection and Belonging** – our “need to be needed”...by nature most people try to avoid loneliness and alienation by giving and receiving love, affection and the sense of belonging.
- **Esteem** – this is a personal sense of value and significance...lack of esteem will lead to frustration, feelings of inferiority, weakness, helplessness and worthlessness.



Summary

Aging is a normal part of living and affects everyone physically, socially and psychologically. Despite the number of changes that take place, basic needs remain the same but the challenge to fulfill them increases.

People's reactions and coping abilities vary considerably from individual to individual. By understanding the aging process and the challenges it presents, home care assistants can help their senior clients come to terms with the inevitable and help them attain and maintain their optimum functioning levels.