AGING
What’s Normal, What’s Not?
Part 1 of a Series

Everyone has his or her own idea of aging. What we consider to be ‘Normal’ tends to reflect our beliefs and personal experiences with older people. Our opinions may also reflect images portrayed in advertising, movies and even greeting cards. Common images include everything from old folks with wrinkly faces, dentures and walkers to beautiful silver haired people walking along the beach.

Aging has more to do with how a person lives and functions, as opposed to a person’s age or how someone looks. Knowing what is considered to be ‘Normal’ aging can help you determine if there might be a cause for concern.

Experts suggest that people who age normally reflect the following:
1. They are physically active.
2. They are socially engaged.
3. They are free from chronic illness.
4. They feel good about themselves.

Even though an estimated 80% of older people are living with one or more long-term or chronic health condition (e.g. arthritis, diabetes, or heart disease), they are able to manage their illness and modify their lifestyle in order to stay active and engaged. (The term ‘Chronic’ means that a person’s health condition can be treated; however, there is no cure.)

People naturally associate age with the length of time that has passed since one’s birth. At the Center for Aging with Dignity, we suggest a better or more relevant measure of age may be ‘How Functional?’ instead of ‘How Old?’ In other words, are you able to function and socialize to the extent you desire?

Did you know in 2007 the average life expectancy in the US was 77.9 years? The figures for white males, black males, white females and black females are 75.9 year, 70 years, 80.8 years and 76.8 years respectively. [See source](www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2011/tables/11s0103.pdf)

As part of a recent study, people aged 65 and older identified what they believed were characteristics of ‘Normal’ or ‘Successful’ aging. Here is what they indicated:
Being able to...

- take care of myself until close to the time of my death
- make choices about things that affect how I age, like my diet, exercise & smoking
- cope with the challenges of my later years
- act according to my own inner standards and values
- meet all of my needs and some of my wants.

Also,

- Successfully manage chronic disease(s)
- Have friends and family who are there for me
- Feel good about myself
- Feel satisfied with my life the majority of the time
- Stay involved with the world and people around me
- Adjust to changes that are related to aging
- Not feel lonely or isolated.

What is Normal Aging to You?
We encourage you to take time and consider the aspects of aging that are most important to you and members of your family. Doing so can help you:

1. Understand your values, personal beliefs and ideals related to the aging process.
2. Determine your health goals and priorities for the later years of life.
3. Communicate your personal preferences should you find yourself in need of care or assistance.

It is much easier for family, friends and health care professionals to carry out someone’s wishes when they know what his or her wishes are. Therefore, we encourage people to write down and share their wishes with family members and health care professionals who may be called upon to provide care or make decisions on their behalf.

If you have concern about yourself or a loved one’s health, well-being or quality of life, speak with your physician or other health care professionals to determine what type of treatment, care and support may be appropriate.

The Center for Aging with Dignity offers the Aging Series as a community service. We are devoted to keeping people “SAFE After 60” by advocating for and advancing best-practice programs on the safety and mistreatment of older people. A1-July ‘11 Copyright © 2006-2011 Charles Puchta – University of Cincinnati. DISCLAIMER – This publication is designed to raise health awareness and is not intended to replace the advice of health care professionals.

References:


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