

How Much Aging Do I Have to Put Up With?

Aging is inevitable. Everyday, bit-by-bit, we get older.

Fortunately, most of the changes go unnoticed until, all of a sudden, we realize we are not as young as we used to be. For some people this realization comes with the first grey hair or onset of wrinkles. For others, it is the decrease in hearing or the sudden dependence on reading glasses. Whatever the sign, most people accept and even joke about the physical changes associated with aging. This is not so, however, for cognitive aging. Changes in the way we think, remember and speak are taboo subjects, are *not* discussed and are certainly *not* joked about.

But is this fair? Our brain works very hard for us. Isn't it allowed, like all other organs, to get tired, and old, and work a little less efficiently?

Yes it is! And instead of denying cognitive aging, instead of covering up our cognitive blunders and hiding them to avoid embarrassment, we need to accept the notion of cognitive aging. We need to better understand what cognitive aging is and learn to communicate our concerns to family members, friends or our doctor.

Research has identified the following common cognitive changes associated with aging: processing speed slows down, encoding information in deep and meaningful ways takes more effort and, divided attention tasks are more difficult.

What does that mean? In a nutshell, aging can cause us to think a little slower, remember a little less, and get a little muddled when we do more than one thing at a time. Surprised? I hope not. After all, compared to when we were younger, most of us run a little slower, bend a little less, and lose our breath going up stairs.

Just as some people age *physically* at different rates, people age *cognitively* at different rates too. While one person may have difficulty remembering names, another may forget what they had for lunch, not sure what the date is or get a little lost or confused on the way home from the grocery store. So how do you know if your cognitive aging is normal or not? Comparing notes and openly communicating with peers and family members is an excellent way to gauge just how serious your 'slips' may be. And in the event you feel the changes you are experiencing are not the norm, please, speak to your doctor. There are many different causes for cognitive change, some simple and some more complex. Often these are curable or treatable.

Be 'head' strong. Play a proactive role in your aging. Stay mentally and physically active. Learn and practice strategies and techniques for cognitive enhancement. Talk about the changes; don't hide them. Just as you might decide to get a hearing aid, new reading glasses, cover up grey hair or apply daily anti-wrinkle cream, please accept the notion of cognitive aging and seek out solutions to help combat it.

This article was written by: Dr. Heather Palmer, reprinted with permission from Living Assistance Services