The Mind: Aging vs. Dementia

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Age Friendly Care in the Great Plains Symposium

OBJECTIVES

- Discuss Myths and Facts about older adults.
- Identify the signs of cognitive decline.
- Identify the signs of a healthy aging mind.
- Describe how to maintain a healthy aging mind.
Reality or Myth?

- Depression and loneliness are normal in older adults.
- Myth
- As they age, people may find they feel isolated and alone. This can lead to feeling depressed, anxious, and sad. This is not a normal part of aging.
- Older adults are less likely to share their feelings.

Reality or Myth?

- The older I get the less sleep I need.
- Myth
- Greater difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep.
- Sleep needs DO NOT decline with age (7-9 hrs)
- Adequate sleep keeps you healthy & alert
- Improves overall well-being
Older Adults Can’t Learn New Things

- Myth – Not True!
- Older adults can still learn new things, create new memories, improve their performance in a variety of skills.
- Trying and learning new skills may improve cognitive abilities.
- Seeking new social connections and engaging in social activities can keep the brain active.

It is inevitable that older people will get dementia

- Myth
- Dementia is not a normal part of aging.
- Many people live into their 90s without significant declines in thinking and behavior or dementia.
- Mild forgetfulness is normal aging process
6 Types of Normal Memory Loss

- Absentmindedness -- Losing things, forgetting
- Blocking – “Tip of the Tongue” moment
- Scrambling– remember-but confuse the details.
- Fading away – “Use it or lose it”
- Struggling for retrieval
  - can’t remember name of someone just met
  - Saw great movie, but can’t remember the title
- Muddled multitasking -- As age harder to focus

Older adults should take it easy and avoid exercise, so they don’t get injured.

- Myth

- Studies show there is more to be gained by staying active and more to lose by sitting too much.
- Physical activity may help manage chronic conditions and are a benefit to mental and physical health.
If a family member has Alzheimer’s disease, I will have it too!

- Myth – Risk may be higher, but it is not an absolute

- Environmental factors such as exercise, diet, exposure to pollutants, and smoking can also affect risk of Alzheimer’s

- There is nothing that can be done to reduce one’s risk of Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Dementias.

- Myth
  - Physical & mental inactivity, smoking, obesity, diabetes, hypertension & depression are associated with increased incidence of Alzheimer’s Disease.
Alzheimer’s Disease & Related Dementias

- ~100 types of dementia
  - After a “night on the town” discover a note in your pocket that you remember nothing about
  - Irreversible fatal Alzheimer’s Disease
- 2 Categories of dementias
  - Curable
  - Non-curable

10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer’s

- Memory loss
- Difficulty performing familiar tasks
- Problems with language
- Disorientation to time and place
- Poor or decreased judgement
- Changes in mood or behavior
- Problems with abstract thinking
- Misplacing things
- Changes in personality
- Loss of initiative
5 Ways to Lower Odds of Alzheimer’s

- Brisk walk (150 min/wk)
- Don’t smoke
- Mediterranean diet
- Light to moderate alcohol consumption
- Do something challenging for the brain
  - Reading, writing, playing games, crosswords
- Decrease by 60% practice 4; 38% decrease if practice 3

Now that I am older, I will have to give up driving.

- **Myth**
  - The number of older adults licensed to drive will continue to increase.
  - 20% of licensed drivers are over 65.
  - Changes occur like slower reaction times, diminished hearing and vision, reduced strength and mobility.
  - Decision should be made on ability to drive safely.
Individual can learn new skills in late life.

- **Reality**

- Older adults can learn skills in late life, but it may take longer than older adults.

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- **Reality**

- Many older adults continue to work, volunteer & act as caregivers.
Tips to Make Aging Well a Reality

- Good Health
- Exercise
- Healthy Lifestyle
- Preventative Health Practices
- Advocate for your health
- Recognize and Treat Mental Health the same as Healthcare
- Stay involved and interested in art, sciences, culture, politics, social activities
- Engage in what matters to you

Improving Brain Health & Cognitive Problems

- Practice memory training techniques
  - Focus – paying attention
  - Frame – Creating visual images & mental associations
  - Jack
  - Examples
    - Crossword puzzles
    - Sudoku (math puzzles)
    - Trivial Pursuit
    - Remembering the grocery list
    - Learn new things
    - Search the internet
    - Take a class
Improving Brain Health & Cognitive Problems

- Reducing stress
  - Relaxation breaks throughout the day
    - Stretching
    - Meditation
    - Conversations with friends
  - Examples
    - Yoga, exercise, tai chi,
    - Restful sleep
    - Cut back on multi-tasking
    - Lighten your load
    - Laugh
    - Getting organized
    - Asking for help

- Get enough sleep
  - Sleep – brain healing
    - Less amyloid plaque
    - Less Inflammation in the brain
  - Treasure your sleep, it’s your friend

- Exercise regularly
  - Your hippocampus – a memory center of the brain – will grow!
  - Bigger brain is better!!
Contact us for more information!

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