**Myths of Aging - Conquering stereotypes of old age.**

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In introducing the concept of normal aging, I would point out that many contemporary images of aging have generally reinforced negative stereotypes of the elderly. Certain conditions do occur but their prevalence and severity have been exaggerated.

Here are some commonly held stereotypes of old age.

***MYTH #1: All old people are the same.***

 REALITY: There is more variety among older people than among any other age group.

***MYTH #2: The basic human needs of older people are different from those of younger people.***

 REALITY: Human needs do not change as we grow old.

***MYTH #3: More than 50 percent of the elderly are senile (that is, they suffer memory, disorientation, and bizarre behavior)***

 REALITY: About 80 percent of older adults are healthy enough to carry out their normal activities.

 ***MYTH # 4: All old people are incompetent.***

 REALITY: Many elderly people, even in the early stages of dementia, can retain their abilities to understand and appreciate information they are given and reason to make important life choices. Physical disabilities are often mistakenly linked to intellectual deficits.

***MYTH #5: There is a lack of productivity with older people.***

 REALITY: While most older people are not in paid employment, they may have important roles as grandparents, caregivers, volunteers, or in civic and social activities.

***MYTH #6: All old people suffer from rigid thinking.***

 REALITY: There is the belief elders shy away from new technologies such as use of computers and the Internet. Over 41 percent of those >65 use the Internet.

***MYTH #7: As people age, their ability to learn often stops.***

 REALITY: Learning patterns may change and speed of learning may diminish but the basic capacity to learn is retained.

***MYTH #8: It is easier to learn new things than it is to recall things from the past.***

 REALITY: The exact opposite is true: It is easier to remember things from the past than it is to learn new things.

***MYTH #9: Forgetfulness is likely to indicate the onset of dementia.***

 REALITY: Memory loss can be caused by medications, medical conditions, or by depression related to life events. Forgetfulness may be an early sign of dementia but it does not necessarily mean a person will be diagnosed with dementia.

***MYTH#10: Everyone who gets old will develop dementia.***

 REALITY: Only 6%-8% of people over age 65 have dementia and 1/3 of those over age 85 have some dementia symptoms.

***MYTH#11: All old people get depressed.***

 REALITY: Most older adults, most of the time, are not depressed. Depression is NOT a normal part of growing old but rather an illness that needs to be treated. Age alone is not a risk factor for depression.

***MYTH#12: Depression in late life is more enduring and difficult to treat than depression at younger ages.***

 REALITY: The course of depression in the elderly is identical to that of younger persons. The response of depression to treatment appears as positive as at other life stages.

*MYTH#13: Depression in late life is typically due to psychological factors.*

 REALITY: Depression in late life is frequently co-morbid with physical illness such as stroke, heart disease, diabetes, and hip fracture. If caregivers misinterpret the nature and different forms of depression, they may not seek diagnosis and treatment.

***MYTH#14: If an older person does not look depressed, he/she does not feel depressed.***

 REALITY: Depression often causes physical problems such as loss of energy, low appetite and weight, trouble sleeping, social withdrawal, and complaints of pain. Depression can also make someone agitated and delusional.

***MYTH#15: If an older person looks depressed, he or she must feel depressed.***

 REALITY: Depression is often mistaken for apathy which has been shown to be a different syndrome from depression.