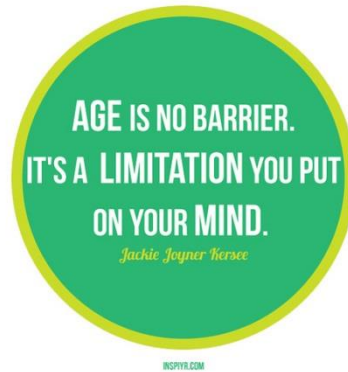


Five Myths About Aging

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Society tends to have a negative perception of aging that is perpetuated through stereotypes; the media often depicts older adults as “slow” in both physical movement and mental capacity. An unfortunately large percentage of people tend to think of aging as a progressive process of loss—of loved ones, memory, flexibility, hair, etc. However, while age may certainly bring challenges to the body and brain, it also brings a number of noteworthy benefits such as increased happiness, better control of emotions and wisdom. Here we take a look at some misconceptions about aging with the hope of promoting a more positive, celebratory view of growing older:

1. **Dementia is an inevitable part of aging.** While it is true that an individual's physical and mental faculties decline with age, implementing healthy lifestyle habits can slow down the process. In addition, dementia and other cognitive conditions are not characteristic of “normal” aging but the result of the underlying disease. According to Dr. Patricia Harris, a geriatrician and associate professor at Georgetown University Medical Center, "dementia should be seen as a modifiable health condition." Regular physical exercise, a healthy diet and cognitive stimulation like completing Sudoku puzzles help maintain and even improve cognitive skills.
2. **Aging means that you will have difficulty learning new skills.** In actuality, older adults tend to have high levels of mental flexibility. For example, the use of Twitter among the ages 50-64 has doubled since November 2010. Clearly it's a misconception that older generations are not able to adapt to technology.
3. **Older people are lonelier.** Despite the common belief that seniors are lonely, older adults usually have close contact with family and friends. More often than not it is the younger generation, rather than older adults, that claims that seniors are lonely.

4. **If you don't exercise in your 20s, 30s and 40s, it's too late to start at age 50 or older.** In a frequently cited study, 50 men and women with an average age of 87 worked out with weights for 10 weeks and increased their muscle strength 113 percent. Clearly you can reap the physical and mental benefits of exercise at any age.

5. **You have no control over your destiny.** According to a study conducted over a 60-year period and published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, "One may have greater personal control over one's biopsychosocial health after retirement than previously recognized." After studying the lives of more than 500 people, researchers found that "successful aging" was largely dependent on seven factors within an individual's control, to a degree: **alcohol use, smoking, marital stability, exercise, body mass index, coping mechanisms and education.**