

What are some common facts about health in seniors?



- As people get older, physiological changes occur in their body as a natural part of aging.
- Physical changes due to aging can occur in almost every organ and can affect seniors' health and lifestyle.
- Some diseases and conditions become more prominent in the elderly.
- Psychosocial issues can also play a role in physical and mental health of older adults.
- A balanced diet and regular [exercise](#) are strongly linked to better health outcomes in seniors.
- A series of routine screening tests and preventive measures are recommended for the elderly.
- Important preventive measures at home can improve the safety and health of seniors.
- Geriatrics is a medical subspecialty dedicated to the care of the elderly. Physicians who have specialized training in this field are known as geriatricians.

What changes occur in the body as we age?

A wide range of changes can happen in the body to different degrees as we age. These changes are not necessarily indicative of an underlying disease but they can be distressing to the individual. Even though the aging process cannot be stopped, being aware of these changes and adopting a healthy lifestyle can reduce their impact on overall health.

Expected bodily changes of aging include change in:

- **Skin:** With aging, skin becomes less flexible, thinner, and more fragile. Easy bruising is noticeable, and [wrinkles](#), age spots, and skin tags may become more apparent. Skin can also become more dry and itchy as a result of less natural skin oil production.
- **Bones, joints, and muscles:** Bones typically lose density and shrink in size making them more susceptible to fractures (breaks). Muscles shrink in mass and become weaker. Joints can suffer from normal wear and tear; joints become inflamed, painful, and less flexible.
- **Mobility and balance:** A person's mobility and balance can be affected by various age related changes. Bone, joint, and muscle problems listed above in conjunction with changes in nervous system are the major contributors to balance problems. Falls may occur resulting in further damage with [bruises](#) and fractures.
- **Body shape:** As a result of bony changes of aging, body stature can become shorter and curvature of the back vertebrae may be altered. Increased muscle loss and reduced fat metabolism can also occur. Fat can redistribute to the abdominal area and buttock areas. Maintaining an ideal body weight becomes more difficult.

- **Face:** Aging changes also take place in the face. Other than wrinkles and age spots, the overall facial contour can change. Overall loss of volume from facial bone and fat can result in less tightness of the facial skin and sagging. The face becomes droopier and bottom heavy.
- **Teeth and gums:** Teeth can become more weak, brittle, and dry. Salivary glands produce less saliva. Gums can also recede (pull back) from the teeth. These changes may result in dry mouth, tooth decay, infections, [bad breath](#), tooth loss, and [gum disease](#).
- **Hair and nail:** Hair can become thinner and weaker as a person ages. Dry hair may lead to [itching](#) and discomfort. Nails may become brittle and unshapely. Nails can also get dry and form vertical ridges. Toe nail thickening (ram's horn shape) is common. Nail fungal infections may occur frequently.
- **Hormones and endocrine glands:** Hormonal changes are seen commonly in the elderly. Most common is the hormonal control of blood sugar and carbohydrate metabolism leading to diabetes. Thyroid dysfunction and problems with fat and cholesterol metabolism are also commonly encountered. Calcium and vitamin D metabolism may also become altered. [Sexual](#) hormones reach a low level and can lead to [erectile dysfunction](#) and [vaginal dryness](#).
- **Memory:** Problems with memory are common in seniors. However, it is important to realize that minor memory problems do not constitute dementia or [Alzheimer's disease](#). Simple lapses of memory such as not remembering where you left a key or whether you locked the door are a normal part of aging.
- **Immunity:** The body's immune system can get weaker with age. Blood cells that fight infections (white blood cells) become less effective leading to more frequent infections.
- **Hearing:** changes in nerves of hearing and ear structures can dim hearing and cause age-related [hearing loss](#). Higher frequencies become harder to hear.
- **Vision:** Eyes can become drier and the lens can lose its accuracy as we age. Vision can be affected by these changes and can become blurry and out of focus. Glasses or contact lenses can help correct these problems.
- **Taste and smell:** Sense of smell and, less commonly, sense of taste may fade leading to poor appetite and [weight loss](#).
- **Bowel and bladder:** Bowel and bladder control can cause problems with incontinence (involuntary loss of feces or urine). Additionally, bowel and bladder habit can change. Constipation is common in older adults, as are urinary frequency and difficulty initiating urine.
- **Sleep:** [Sleep](#) patterns can significantly change with age. Duration of sleep, quality of sleep, and frequent night time awakening are commonly seen in seniors.

These changes are different in every individual. Some people may experience more changes in a particular area compared to others.