Development Through the Lifespan

Chapter 17
Physical and Cognitive Development in Late Adulthood

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Functional Age

- Actual competence and performance
- May not match chronological age

Aging and the Nervous System

- Loss of brain weight accelerates after 60
- Neurons lost in frontal lobes, corpus callosum, cerebellum (balance), glial cells
- Autonomic nervous system less efficient
- Brain can compensate
  - New fibers, neurons
  - New connections
  - Use more parts of brain
Adapting to Physical Changes of Aging

- Multidimensional
  - Appearance versus functioning
- Effective coping strategies
  - Prevention, compensation
  - Problem-centered coping
- Assistive technology

Stereotypes of Aging

- Many assume deterioration is inevitable
  - Elders experience prejudice, discrimination
  - Assumptions affected by culture
- Stereotype threat
  - Fear of confirming stereotype reduces functioning
- May be changing
  - Positive media portrayals

Primary and Secondary Aging

**Primary**
- Genetically influenced declines
- Affects all members of species
- Even happens if health is good

**Secondary**
- Declines due to heredity and environment
- Effects individualized
  - Major contributor to frailty
- Illnesses and disabilities
  - Arthritis
  - Diabetes
  - Mental disabilities
Mental Disabilities in Late Adulthood

**Dementia** - thought and behavior impairments that disrupt everyday life
- Parkinson’s disease
- Alzheimer’s disease
- Cerebrovascular dementia
  - Strokes
- Misdiagnosis, reversible dementia
  - Depression
  - Medication side effects

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Alzheimer’s Disease

**Incidence**
- Higher with age - nearly 50% over 80

**Symptoms**
- Forgetting, disorientation, personality change, depression, motor problems, delusions, speech problems, infections

**Brain Changes**
- Neurofibrillary tangles, amyloid plaques in cerebral cortex

**Risk Factors/Protective Factors**
- Genetic predispositions
- High-fat diet - Mediterranean diet may help
- Education, active lifestyle may help

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Help for Caregivers of Elders with Dementia

- Knowledge
  - About the diseases, available resources
- Coping Strategies
- Caregiving Skills
- Respite
  - At least twice a week
  - Video Respite
Selective Optimization with Compensation
- **Select**
  - Choose personally valued activities, avoid others
- **Optimize**
  - Devote diminishing resources to valued activities
- **Compensate**
  - Find creative ways to overcome limitations

Deliberate versus Automatic Memory
- **Deliberate**
  - Recall more difficult
    - Context helps retrieval, but slower processing, smaller working memory make context harder to encode
- **Automatic**
  - Recognition easier than recall
    - More environmental support
  - Implicit memory better than deliberate
    - Without conscious awareness
    - Depends on familiarity

Associative Memory Declines in Late Adulthood
- Difficulty in creating or retrieving links between pieces of information
- Using memory cues, enhancing meaningfulness of information, can help
Remote and Prospective Memory

**Remote**
- Very long-term recall
- Autobiographical memory

**Prospective**
- Remembering to engage in planned actions
- Event-based easier than time-based
- Use reminders, repetition to help

Aging and Autobiographical Memories

Language Processing in Late Adulthood

- Comprehension changes very little
- Problems retrieving specific words
  - Tip-of-the-tongue
  - Use more pronouns, pauses in speech
- Problems planning what to say
  - Hesitations, false starts, repetition, sentence fragments
  - Statements less organized
- Compensation
  - Simpler grammar, more sentences, gist
Erikson’s Theory: Ego Integrity versus Despair

**Ego Integrity**
- Feel whole, complete, satisfied with achievements
- Serenity and contentment
- Associated with psychosocial maturity

**Despair**
- Feel many decisions were wrong, but now time is too short
- Bitter and unaccepting of coming death
- Expressed as anger and contempt for others

Peck: Three Tasks of Ego Integrity

- Ego differentiation versus work-role preoccupation
- Body transcendence versus body preoccupation
- Ego transcendence versus ego preoccupation
Gerotranscendence

- Beyond ego integrity
- Cosmic, transcendent perspective
- Directed beyond self
  - Forward and outward
- Heightened inner calm
- Quiet reflection

Emotional Expertise

- Cognitive-affective complexity
  - Declines for many
- Affect optimization improves
  - Maximize positive emotions, dampen negative ones
- More vivid emotional perceptions
  - Make sure of own emotions
  - Use emotion-centered coping

Reminiscence and Life Review

**Reminiscence**
- Telling stories about people, events, thoughts and feelings from past
  - Self-focused: can deepen despair
  - Other-focused: solidifies relationships
  - Knowledge-based: helps solve problems

**Life Review**
- Considering the meaning of past experiences
- A form of reminiscence
- For greater self-understanding
- Can help adjustment
Personality in Late Adulthood

- Secure, multifaceted self-concept
  - Allows self-acceptance
  - Continue to pursue possible selves
- Shifts in some characteristics
  - More agreeable
  - Less sociable
  - Greater acceptance of change

Factors in Psychological Well-Being

- Control versus dependency
- Health
  - Poor health, depression linked
  - Suicide risk
- Negative life changes
- Social support, interaction
- Social interaction

Control and Dependency in Late Adulthood

- Dependency-support script
  - Attend immediately to dependent behaviors
- Independence-ignore script
  - Ignore independent behaviors
- Scripts work together
  - Both reinforce dependency
  - Make social contact less pleasant
Elder Suicide

- Suicide increases over lifespan
  - Men more likely than women
  - Whites most likely
- Prompted by losses, terminal illnesses
  - Retirement, widowhood
- Indirect methods
  - Refusing food, medical treatment

Social Theories of Aging

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disengagement</td>
<td>Mutual withdrawal of elders and society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity Theory</td>
<td>Social barriers cause declining interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity Theory</td>
<td>Strive to maintain consistency between past and future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioemotional</td>
<td>Social networks become more selective with age; extends lifelong process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selectivity Theory</td>
<td>• Emphasize emotion-regulating functions of social contact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age-Related Changes in Number of Social Partners

- Graph showing changes in number of social partners over age.
Friendships in Late Adulthood

- Friends provide:
  - Intimacy
  - Companionship
  - Acceptance
  - Link to community
  - Help with loss
- Feels closest to a few nearby friends
- Chooses friends similar to self
- Sex differences continue

Relationships with Adult Children

- Quality of relationship affects elders’ physical, mental health
- Assist each other
  - Direction changes toward children helping as parents age
  - Closeness affects willingness to help
  - Emotional support most often
  - Parents try to avoid dependency
- Sex differences
  - Daughters closer