Maxine on Aging: Myths and Realities of the Golden Years

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Myths and Realities Quiz

Mark each statement as either true or false.

1. Chronological age is the most important determinant of someone’s age.
2. Dementia is inevitable part of aging.
3. After age 40, almost everyone has a harder time seeing things that are closer than 2 feet.
4. The elderly are incapable of making decisions alone.
5. Sex ends when you pass the age of 50.
6. Older drivers have most of the driving accidents.
7. Women fear aging.
8. It’s too late or pointless to change bad habits in later life.
9. Shingles target the elderly.
10. Depression is more common in the elderly.
11. The elderly experience sensory loss.
12. Older people tend to become slow, grumpy, and set in their ways.
14. Osteoporosis is common in elderly women AND men.
15. The elderly are more prone to sleep complaints.
16. The elderly cannot learn new things.
17. Incontinence increases with age.

Keep your Wits about you

Content area: Mental health
Core content: Language arts
Grade level: 9-adult
Time: 15-20 minutes
Materials: Index card for each group (exercising body and mind; engaging with others; expressing your talents; experiencing the moment)
Objectives:
1. Identify 3 ways to exercise the brain.
2. Explain how the elderly can take steps to interact with others.
3. Identify ways the elderly may express their talents.
4. Determine ways the elderly may “live in the moment.”

Procedures:
1. Divide class into at least 4 small groups.
2. Assign one of the following methods for maintaining brain health to each group:
   a. exercising the body and mind
   b. engaging with others
   c. expressing your talents
   d. experiencing the moment
3. Distribute butcher block and marker to each group. Have each group select one person to be the recorder.
4. Explain that each group is to determine why their method is important in maintaining brain health and to identify ways to initiate and/or give examples of each method.
5. Allow several minutes for groups to record their responses and display their decisions.
6. Discussion: Review responses from each group and supplement with the following information, as needed.
   a. **Exercise your body and mind.**
      1) Staying physically active improves our ability to plan, focus and shift quickly between tasks. It also triggers a “positive and energizing outlook” that may improve memory and decision-making skills. Exercise encourages the growth of new brain cells (a process called neurogenesis). Researchers have found that “maintaining an intellectually engaged and physically active lifestyle promotes successful cognitive aging.” Even if one hasn’t exercised in years, it is never too late to start or to enjoy the benefits of exercise. Age is not a barrier. **George Blevins** and **John Donnelly** were over 100 years old when they competed in sporting events for bowling and table tennis, respectively.
      2) Then there’s intellectual exercise. It doesn’t matter what kind - just that you break out of your comfort zone. Even writing letters twice a week instead of sending e-mail can have brain-strengthening benefits. Such novel activities stimulate more regions of the brain, increasing blood flow and helping to not only build brain connections, but improve the health of existing tissue.
   b. **Engage with others.** However community is defined, being a respected and valued member of a community helps keep us mentally sharp. Engaging in activities with others—visiting friends and family, attending church, dining out, traveling, doing volunteer work or being involved with charitable groups—is an antidote for loss of mental acuity. Strong ties to others can even increase longevity.
   c. **Express your talents.** Mother Teresa of Calcutta is quoted as saying, “The world is hungry for our help and our love.” In the second half of life, we have the unique opportunity to bring our authentic and wholehearted self to our chosen tasks and build our legacy. One researcher says, “Finding something to live for is an essential requirement to a happy and fulfilling life,” regardless of where one is in the lifespan. Margaret Mead tells us that “if you associate enough with older
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people who do enjoy their lives, who are not stored away in any golden ghettos, you will gain a sense of continuity and of the possibility for a full life.”

d. **Experience the moment.** Resolve to live in the here and now. Give attention to each passing moment. Ignore distracting thoughts and become mindful of what you are tasting, feeling, smelling, hearing, feeling and seeing. When you go for a walk, look around. Enjoy nature in all its glory. Researchers tell us that by hitting the mental pause button, by stepping into the present moment and by becoming more mindful, we slow the aging process.

The myths about inevitable mental deterioration with aging are falling by the wayside. Instead of being put out to pasture at age 65, seniors are increasingly playing diverse roles in society as workers, family members, business owners, caregivers, volunteers and consumers.

**Extension:**

Interview an elderly person (over 65) to determine how s/he employs each of these methods. Offer your opinion as to what, if any, changes s/he may want to consider.

**I See what You’re Saying**

Select activity or activities of your preference

a) Have 2-3 people give instructions to a person at the same time. Ask the person to repeat the instructions given. ([Illustrates how one’s hearing changes over time – difficulty distinguishing sounds, etc.])

b) Have a blindfolded person listen to instructions given at a fast pace. Either ask them to repeat the instructions or to perform the task (depending on instructions given). ([Illustrates how often we depend upon seeing someone talk to hear what someone is saying.])

c) Have participants put on “plastic/rubber” gloves and try to pick up a small square of paper from a table. Or use very thick gloves to try to tie their shoes. ([Demonstrate the loss of dexterity, often caused by arthritis or other conditions.])