

Chapter 8

Care of the Older Person

Development

- People live longer, are healthier, and are more active than ever before.
- Late adulthood involves these age ranges:
 - Young-old—between 65 and 74 years of age
 - Old—between 75 and 84 years of age
 - Old-old—85 years of age and older
- Gerontology is the study of the aging process.
- Geriatrics is the care of aging people.
- Aging is normal.
 - Normal changes occur in body structure and function.

Growth and Development

- Growth is the physical changes that are measured and that occur in a steady and orderly manner.
- Development relates to changes in mental, emotional, and social function.
- Growth and development occur in a sequence, order, and pattern.
 - Certain skills must be completed during each stage.
 - A stage cannot be skipped.
 - Each stage has its own characteristics and developmental tasks.

Social Changes

- Retirement is a reward for a life-time of work.
- Retirement often means reduced income.
- Social relationships change throughout life.
- Some children care for older parents.
- A partner dies (the person loses a lover, friend, companion, and confidant).

Physical Changes

- Body processes slow down.
- Energy level and body efficiency decline.
- The changes occur over many years.

The Integumentary System

● The integumentary system

- The skin loses its elasticity, strength, and fatty tissue layer.
- Oil and sweat secretion decreases.
- The skin is fragile and easily injured.
- Brown spots appear on the skin.
- Fewer nerve endings affect the sensing of heat, cold, and pain.
- Dry skin causes itching.
- Nails become thick and tough.
- Feet usually have poor circulation.
- White or gray hair is common.
- Hair loss occurs in men. Hair thins in men and women.
- Facial hair may occur in women.

The Musculoskeletal System

- The musculoskeletal system
 - Muscle cells decrease in number.
 - Muscles atrophy and decrease in strength.
 - Bones lose strength, become brittle, and break easily.
 - Joints become stiff and painful.
 - Vertebrae shorten.
 - Hip and knee joints flex (bend) slightly.
 - There is gradual loss of height and strength.
 - Mobility decreases.

The Nervous System

● The nervous system

- Nerve cells are lost.
- Nerve conduction and reflexes slow.
- Responses are slower.
- Blood flow to the brain is reduced.
 - Dizziness may occur, increasing the risk for falls.
- Changes in brain cells and reduced blood flow to the brain affect personality and mental function.
- Less sleep is needed.
- The senses
 - Hearing and vision losses occur.
 - Taste and smell dull.
 - Touch and sensitivity to pain and pressure are reduced.
 - Sensing heat and cold are reduced.

The Circulatory System

- The circulatory system
 - The heart muscle weakens.
 - The heart pumps blood with less force.
 - Arteries narrow and are less elastic.
 - Poor circulation occurs in many body parts.
 - A weak heart must work harder to pump blood through narrowed vessels.
 - Blood vessels decrease in number.
 - When circulatory changes are severe, rest is needed during the day.

The Respiratory System

- The respiratory system
 - Respiratory muscles weaken.
 - Lung tissue becomes less elastic.
 - Difficult, labored, or painful breathing (dyspnea) may occur with activity.
 - The person may lack strength to cough and clear the airway of secretions.
 - Respiratory infections and diseases may develop.

The Digestive System

- The digestive system
 - Salivary glands produce less saliva.
 - This can cause difficulty swallowing (dysphagia).
 - Taste and smell become dull.
 - This decreases appetite.
 - Secretion of digestive juices decreases.
 - Loss of teeth and wearing ill-fitting dentures cause chewing problems.
 - Peristalsis decreases.
 - The stomach and colon empty slower.
 - Flatulence and constipation can occur.

The Urinary System

- The urinary system
 - Kidney function decreases.
 - The kidneys shrink (atrophy).
 - Blood flow to the kidneys is reduced.
 - The ureters, bladder, and urethra lose tone and elasticity.
 - Bladder muscles weaken.
 - Bladder size decreases.
 - Urinary incontinence (inability to control the passage of urine from the bladder) may occur.
 - In men, the prostate gland enlarges.
 - Urinary tract infections are risks.

The Reproductive System: Men

- The reproductive system
 - Changes in men:
 - Decreases in testosterone affect strength, sperm production, and reproductive tissues.
 - Achieving erection takes longer.
 - The phase between erection and orgasm is longer.
 - Orgasm is less forceful than when younger.
 - Erections are lost quickly.
 - The time between erections is longer.

The Reproductive System: Women

- Changes in women:
 - Menopause occurs between 45 and 55 years of age.
 - Female hormones (estrogen and progesterone) decrease.
 - The uterus, vagina, and genitalia shrink (atrophy).
 - Vaginal walls thin.
 - Vaginal dryness may make intercourse uncomfortable or painful.
 - Arousal takes longer.
 - Orgasm is less intense.

Needing Nursing Center Care

- Nursing centers are options for older persons who cannot care for themselves.
- The person needing nursing center care may suffer some or all of these losses:
 - Loss of identity as a productive member of a family and community
 - Loss of possessions
 - Loss of independence
 - Loss of real-world experiences
 - Loss of health and mobility

Sexuality

- Sexuality is the physical, emotional, social, cultural, and spiritual factors that affect a person's feelings and attitudes about his or her sex.
- Love, affection, and intimacy are needed throughout life.
- Attitudes and sexual needs change with aging.
 - They are affected by life events.

Sexual Needs

- Meeting sexual needs
 - The nursing team promotes the meeting of sexual needs.
 - Married couples in nursing centers can share the same room.
 - They can share the same bed if their health permits.
 - Single persons may develop relationships.

Sexual Aggression

- The sexually aggressive person
 - Often there are reasons for the person's behavior. Reasons include:
 - Nervous system disorders
 - Confusion, disorientation, and dementia
 - Drug side effects
 - Fever
 - Poor vision
 - Changes in the person's mental function
 - Gaining attention

Sexual Aggression, cont'd.

- Touching or fondling the genitals can be:
 - For sexual pleasure
 - From genital soreness or itching
 - From poor hygiene
 - From being wet or soiled from urine or feces
 - From health problems
- Sometimes the purpose of touch is sexual.
 - You must be professional about the matter.
 - Ask the person not to touch you.
 - Tell the person that you will not do what he or she wants.
 - Tell the person what behaviors make you uncomfortable.
 - Allow privacy if the person is becoming aroused.
 - Discuss the matter with the nurse.
 - Follow the care plan.

Sexual Aggression, cont'd.

- The person must be protected from unwanted sexual comments and advances.
 - This is sexual abuse.
 - Tell the nurse right away.