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# Chapter 2

## The Aging Experience

# Introduction

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- Aging
  - Is a part of living
  - Affects all aspects of life
  - Each person reflects individual diversity
- More older adults are living today than in the past.
- 15% of the U.S. population is 65 years of age or older.

# Impact of Aging on Nursing

- Patients over age 65 receive care in acute care hospitals, home care, and nursing homes
- Older adults
  - Are more educated
  - Are a powerful political force
  - Want more say in the health-care services that they receive
  - Erikson stage of life-Integrity vs. Despair
  - Are unique in own way and have individual characteristics

# Attitudes Toward Aging

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- Many myths, stereotypes, and prejudices about old age exist in our culture.
- These lead to discrimination against older people.
- Negative attitudes toward aging impact the physical and psychological well-being of patients.

# Ageism

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- Systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people simply because they are old
- Allows the younger generation to see older people as different
- Negative attitudes exist subtly, covertly, and unconsciously.
- Negative images of the nursing home are examples of ageism.

# Ageism

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- Thinking that one older adult is just like another is an expression of ageism.
- Society has kept most of us from knowing about the aging process and respecting those who survive it.
- Determine if you are ageist.

# Theories of Aging

## ■ Physiological

- Genetic-claims that animals and humans are born with genes that predetermine their life span.
- Wear and tear-body parts show the effects of the complex and sophisticated work the body does through the years.
- Nutrients-aging and the quality of aging depend on a person's nutritional intake over the span of his or her life

## ■ Psychological

- Developmental tasks-Integrity vs Despair
- Subculture-includes attitudes that are common to multiple members of the group and beliefs, expectations, and behaviors
- Continuity-states that as people change, their basic personality and behavioral patterns do not change

# Normal Aging Process

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- Alterations in body structure and function that occur gradually throughout life-need to assess ADL and Instrumental ADLs
- Aging is a normal developmental event.
- Patterns of aging vary dramatically among older adults.
- Interplay of physical, social, and environmental influences

# Normal Aging Process

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- Normal aging and disease are separate entities.
- Includes gains and losses and does not necessarily indicate decline
- Successful adaptation to the aging process is accomplished by most older adults.

# Normal Physiological Changes According to Body Systems

## ■ Cardiovascular

- Heart-decreased cardiac output-muscle strength diminished; valves thicker and rigid
- Blood vessels-atherosclerosis (plaque) and arteriosclerosis (thickening/hardening of walls of arteries)
- Blood-anemias; volume reduced

## ■ Respiratory

- Skeletal-thoracic becomes shorter; rib cage rigid
- Accessory muscles-weaken
- Intrapulmonary changes-alveoli enlarged and capillary membrane thickness increased
- Functional changes-gas exchange decreased due to changes

# Normal Physiological Changes According to Body Systems

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- Musculoskeletal
  - Bone structure-brittle and weak; vertebrae shorten
  - Muscle strength-wasting; thinner extremities; loss of flexibility
  - Joints- limited ROM
  - Functional changes

# Normal Physiological Changes According to Body Systems

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- Integumentary
  - Skin-decrease subcut tissue (fat)
  - Hair-brittle and dry
  - Nails-thicker and harder
  - Sweat glands-decreased sweat production and loss of sub cut tissue makes more susceptible to altered temperature regulation
  - Functional changes

# Normal Physiological Changes According to Body Systems

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- **Gastrointestinal**
  - Oral cavity-assess teeth; dentures
  - Esophagus-gag reflex weakens; delaying emptying time
  - Stomach-decreased gastric acid secretion; vitamin B12 and protein decreased absorption
  - Intestines-slower peristalsis; causing problems with indigestion, constipation, possible anorexia
  - Functional changes

# Normal Physiological Changes According to Body Systems

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## ■ Genitourinary

- Renal function-blood flow decrease and GFR decreased
- Bladder-loss of muscle tone; not emptying completely
- Micturition-men increase in frequency; women increased frequency
- Functional changes

## ■ Reproductive

- Age-related functions
- Functional changes

# Normal Physiological Changes According to Body Systems

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## ■ Nervous

- Neurons-loss in the brain and spinal cord; neurotransmitters diminished; brain mass loss
- Movement-balance impaired; reaction time decrease
- Sleep-insomnia; decrease in deep sleep and REM
- Functional changes

# Normal Physiological Changes According to Body Systems

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- Special sense organs
  - Vision-change in accommodation to light to dark so takes time for vision to adjust puts them at risk; more dryness making susceptible to infections
  - Hearing-loss of high frequency tones-presbycusis
  - Taste-loss of taste buds
  - Touch-loss of touch, pain, temperature decrease
  - Functional changes