

Module 3. Working with Elders

Goal

The goal of this module is to prepare participants to help elders cope with the changes associated with aging.

Time

3.5 hours (includes 30 minutes for break and warm-up or closing)

Activities	Methods	Time
3.1 Building Empathy	Individual exercise, large-group exercise, and poem	40 minutes
3.2 Physical Changes As We Age	Large-group exercise	40 minutes
3.3 Experiencing Sensory Changes	Pairs work and discussion	30-45 minutes (depending on size of group)
3.4 Helping Consumers to Manage Physical Changes of Aging	Small-group work and interactive presentation	40 minutes
3.5 Summary	Interactive presentation and large-group exercise	15 minutes

Supplies

- Pencils or pens
- Flip chart, markers, tape
- All the “Body Systems” flip chart pages from Module 5
- Construction paper, blank paper, tape
- 5x8 index cards
- “Prizes” for Activity 3.2 – enough small items, e.g., fruit or snack packs, to distribute one to each participant
- Items for demonstration stations: rubber gloves (at least 2 pairs); cotton balls; change purse with coins (at least one dime); small packets of mints in a basket; bandanas or headbands; goggles (at least two pair); Vaseline; newspaper; shoebox with various small objects; needles (at least two) and thread
- *Instructor’s Guide: Experiential Station Instructions*
- *Instructor’s Guide: Answers: Myths and Truths about Aging*

Handouts

- Handout 3.1 Myths and Truths about Aging
- Handout 3.2 Warning: When I Am an Old Woman, I Shall Wear Purple
- Handout 3.3 Changes in the Body as We Age
- Handout 3.4 Changes in Body Systems as We Age, and How You Can Assist Elders to Manage the Changes
- Handout 3.4a Circulatory System
- Handout 3.4b Digestive System
- Handout 3.4c Nervous System
- Handout 3.4d Respiratory System
- Handout 3.4e Skeletomuscular System
- Handout 3.4f The Skin
- Handout 3.4g Urinary and Reproductive Systems
- Handout 3.5 Summary: Caring for Older Consumers

Advance Preparation

Review all training and presentation materials for this session.

Copy all handouts for participants.

Activity 3.1: Building Empathy

Prepare flip chart pages for the Learning Agenda (step 1) and with questions for “When I am 80” (step 4).

Activity 3.3: Experiencing Physical Changes

Set up demonstration stations, as follows. Prepare 5x8 cards with instructions found in *Instructor’s Guide, Activity 3.3*.

- Station 1: One pair of rubber gloves with cotton balls in the fingertips; a change purse with at least one dime; a basket or bowl with packages of mints (one package for each participant)
- Station 2 (may be combined with 1, for smaller groups): Rubber gloves with cotton balls in the fingertips, needle, thread
- Station 3: Bandana or headband
- Station 4: Cotton balls
- Station 5: Goggles smeared with Vaseline; a shoebox containing numerous small objects
- Station 6 (may be combined with 5, for smaller groups): Goggles smeared with Vaseline; newspaper

To make best use of the time, set up as many demonstration stations as the number of pairs in your training group.

Activity 3.4: Helping Consumers Deal with Physical Changes

Working from Handout 3.4, “Changes in the Body Systems as We Age, and How You Can Assist Consumers to Manage the Changes,” copy the “Common Changes,” “Common Situations,” and “How You Can Assist...” on separate 5x8 index cards, or on half-sheets of 8 ½ x 11-inch paper. Do not label the systems!

If possible, laminate the cards for durability and re-use.

Prepare a flip chart page with the instructions for group work (step 2).

Post the flip chart pages for all the Body Systems (from Module 8) around the room. Post the Urinary System and the Reproductive System pages together.

ACTIVITY 3.1 Building Empathy

40 minutes

Learning Outcome

By the end of this activity, participants will be able to:

- Identify their own attitudes toward aging.

Key Content

- ❖ Many common thoughts about aging are not based on fact. This module examines myths and truths.
- ❖ Everyone has ideas and feelings about what it will be like to get older, and these can influence the attitudes participants may have when working with elders. It is important for participants to be aware of their own thoughts and feelings about aging as they identify the needs of elders and ways of assisting them.

Activity Steps

Individual exercise: Pre-test (10 minutes)

1. Introduce the module by explaining that the goal is to prepare participants to help elder consumers deal with changes related to aging. Note that everyone has ideas and feelings about what it will be like to get older, and these can influence their work with consumers. In this module, participants will be considering their own thoughts about aging as they identify the needs of elders and how to assist them. Post and review the prepared flip chart page with the “Learning Agenda” for this module.



LEARNING AGENDA: MODULE 6

- Myths and truths about aging
- Building empathy for elder consumers
- Physical changes of aging
- Changes in body systems
- Assisting elders to manage changes

2. Distribute Handout 3.1 “Myths and Truths about Aging.” Ask participants to label each question “True” or “False,” and then turn the paper face down on the table in front of them. Explain at the end of the module, they will have a chance to correct their own papers to see how their ideas about aging may have changed during the class. The papers will not be collected, so this is just for insight into their own thinking.

Individual exercise: “When I am 80”¹ (5 minutes)

3. Explain that it helps people, when working with elders, to identify their own thoughts and feelings about aging. Distribute one 5 x 8 index card to each participant. Ask them not to write their names on the cards.
4. Post the prepared flip chart sheet for “When I am 80.” Ask participants to imagine what life will be like when they are 80 years old, and briefly write their answers to these questions on their cards, numbering each one. Note that the cards will be collected, mixed up, and handed out again. Their answers will be shared in the large group, but without anyone knowing whose answers they are -- until the end, when they will try to guess. Remind them not to write their names on their cards.



WHEN I AM 80:

1. Where will I be living?
2. What will I look like?
3. What will I be doing?
4. In what ways will I be the same as I am now?

Large-group exercise (20 minutes)

5. Collect the cards, mix them up, and redistribute them at random. Note that, if someone gets their own card back, they should keep it and not say anything about it. It will actually make the game more interesting!

¹ “When I Am 80” is adapted from an exercise of the same name in *Strengths based care management for older adults* by Becky Fast and Rosemary Chapin (Health Professions Press, 2000; <http://www.healthpropress.com>) and is included with permission pending from the publisher.

6. Starting with the first question -- “Where will I be living?” -- ask participants to share the answers on their cards. Remind participants to be respectful of each answer, knowing that these answers reflect each person’s individual thoughts.
7. Do the same for the rest of the questions. After they have shared their responses to the last question, participants can guess whose card they are holding.

⇒ **Teaching Tips**

- The objective of this activity is to provide a safe way to share participants’ thoughts and feelings about their own aging and to start to build empathy for the elder consumers they may be working with. Guessing whose card each person is holding is not the objective of this activity, but it is a fun aspect of the activity and nearly impossible to stop.
- Make sure that participants show respect for each other’s answers to the questions. If a response is surprising, ask them to consider what that response tells them about a person and how they would respond if one of their consumers had the same thought.

8. Ask participants:
 - *What do these responses tell you about yourselves as a group, and how you think about aging?*
 - *Do you think these responses are typical of most people?*

Note that people have different expectations of aging. Some people have very positive ideas about what life will be like when they get older, and do not think about needing the assistance of a direct-care worker. Other people expect the worst and can’t imagine enjoying life once their body starts showing signs of aging. Explain, in their jobs as direct-care workers, one of their roles will be to try to make their consumers’ lives as close as possible to what they would have wished when they were younger.

Poem (5 minutes)

9. Distribute and read aloud Handout 3.2, “Warning: When I Am an Old Woman, I Shall Wear Purple²” -- or select participants who are comfortable with reading aloud to read one stanza each. Ask participants if they know anyone who fits this description. Remind participants that the vast majority of elders are healthy, live on their own, and enjoy freedom from many of the responsibilities that the rest of us struggle with every day.

² By Jenny Joseph. http://labyrinth_3.tripod.com/page59.html

ACTIVITY 3.2 Physical Changes As We Age

40 minutes

Learning Outcome

By the end of this activity, participants will be able to:

- Describe at least six common physical changes experienced by older adults.

Key Content

- ❖ The population in the U.S. aged 65 and older, in 2007, is estimated at 38 million, or 12.6 percent of the total population. About 16 million are men and 22 million are women.³
- ❖ Most elders desire independence. As of 2006, only 4.3 percent of older adults were living in institutions.⁴
- ❖ Aging is a normal, gradual process. Each person ages in his or her own way. Aging is physical and mental rather than a matter of years, and is influenced by inherited factors, life experiences, stress, and disease.

Activity Steps

Large-group exercise (40 minutes)

1. Note the population statistics from “Key Content,” and the fact that this segment of the population will get much larger over the next ten years as the “baby boomers” reach retirement age.
2. Note that, overall, elders today are healthy and active. In 2006, only 4.3 percent were living in institutions. However, people do experience many changes as a part of normal aging, some of which affect quality of life and may require assistance. Many of these changes are familiar to participants, so they will play a game to quickly identify the most common changes.
3. Divide participants into three groups. Explain that you are going to ask three questions about aging. For each question, they are to write down as many answers as they can think of within their group. The group with the most correct answers wins a prize! Make sure that each group has paper and pens or pencils, and that someone has been designated as the “recorder” before you ask the first question.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demography_of_the_United_States#Current_U.S._Population

⁴ 2006 American Community Survey. http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/STTable?_bm=y&-qr_name=ACS_2006_EST_G00_S2601B&-ds_name=ACS_2006_EST_G00_-state=st&-lang=en

4. Ask:

- *What are some of the changes that occur with our senses?*

Give the groups five minutes to list all the answers they can think of.

5. Call “Time’s Up” and then ask each group to give two answers from their list. Write correct responses on flip chart paper. Keep going around until all the groups’ answers have been given. Ask each group to count the number of correct answers they listed. The group with the highest number is the “winner” for that round. Give each group member a “prize” (see Advance Preparation).

⇒ **Teaching Tip**

Refer to Handout 3.3 “Changes in the Body as We Age,” for the possible answers, but do not distribute the handout until after the activity is finished.

6. Repeat the process for the second question:

- *What are some of the changes in our physical appearance?*

If the same group gets the highest number of correct items, award the prize to the group with the next highest number.

7. Repeat the process for the last question:

- *What are some of the changes in our body’s function?*

This time, regardless of which group had the highest number of answers, announce that the “prize” for that question will go to the group that did not yet get a prize — because they all made a good effort!

8. Distribute Handout 3.3, “Changes in the Body as We Age,” which summarizes answers to all three questions. Note that the next activity will allow them to experience some of the changes in their senses first-hand.

ACTIVITY 3.3 Experiencing Sensory Changes

30-45 minutes (depending on size of group)

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this activity, participants will be able to:

- Describe their own experience of sensory deprivation — sight, hearing, touch.
- Demonstrate helping a consumer to cope with sensory deprivation.

Key Content

- ❖ Changes in our senses—sight, hearing, touch, taste—may not seem like major health issues, but can have a huge impact on quality of life. Experiencing how these changes can affect common everyday tasks helps participants understand the challenges that elders may experience.
- ❖ In addition, practicing how to assist someone who is experiencing these changes can provide important insights and develop skills.

Activity Steps

Pairs work: Demonstration Stations (20-35 minutes)

1. Put participants in pairs. Point out the demonstration stations set up around the training space (see Advance Preparation). Explain that participants, in their pairs, will go to each station and follow the instructions on the index card found there. In each pair, they will take turns acting as the consumer and as the direct-care worker. They will move through the different stations until every participant has experienced every demonstration station as a consumer and as a direct-care worker.
2. Assign one pair to each station to get them started. Monitor the time and suggest when they should switch roles within their pair, and when they should move on to the next station.

Discussion (10 minutes)

3. After the pairs have completed the stations, have them take their seats and ask the following questions:
 - *How did it feel to do these stations?*
 - *Which activity was hardest for you as the consumer? The easiest?*
 - *How did it feel to be the direct-care worker? What was hardest for you? Easiest?*

ACTIVITY 3.4 Helping Consumers to Manage Physical Changes

40 minutes

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this activity, participants will be able to:

- Describe physical changes to body systems that are caused by aging.
- List ways the direct-care worker can assist the consumer to manage those changes.

Key Content

- ❖ Each body system changes in particular ways as we age. Learning how the changes are linked to the body systems can help participants to learn general strategies for assisting consumers to manage these changes.
- ❖ Although physical changes of aging are unavoidable, they are not necessarily signs of illness. It is important to know the difference in order to assist elders to manage normal changes, and to seek medical attention when it may be a sign of disease.

Activity Steps

Small group work (20 minutes)

1. Explain that, to learn and remember strategies for assisting consumers with the common conditions of aging, participants can draw on their knowledge of the body systems. Point out the flip chart pages from Module 5, which are posted around the room. Note that the Urinary System and the Reproductive System will be combined for this activity.
2. Split participants into seven groups. Post and review the prepared flip chart page with instructions for group work, noting that they will have 15 minutes for this assignment. Remind participants that they can refer to their text or handouts about body systems to help with this task. As before, you will also be available at the “help desk.”



GROUP INSTRUCTIONS:

Common Changes of Aging,
Common Situations, and
How You Can Assist

- Read your “Common Changes” card together and decide which body system it describes. Tape the card to the flip chart page for the body system.
- Do the same with “Common Situations.”
- Do the same with “How You Can Assist...”
- Stay with this body system, and prepare to present to the large group.

3. **MIX UP THE CARDS FOR EACH CATEGORY. DISTRIBUTE ONE “COMMON CHANGES” CARD, ONE “COMMON SITUATIONS” CARD, AND ONE “HOW YOU CAN ASSIST” CARD TO EACH GROUP. ONCE EVERY GROUP HAS ALL THREE CARDS, TELL THEM TO BEGIN.**

⇒ **Teaching Tip**

When preparing their presentation, groups may find that the “Common Changes” or “Common Situations” card is on the wrong body system. Instruct them to consult the “help desk.” Guide the group to figure out where the wrong card belongs, and then search for the card that goes with their body system.

INTERACTIVE PRESENTATIONS (25 MINUTES)

4. One group at a time, ask each group to stand next to their body system flip chart page and report the common changes, common situations, and how the direct-care worker can assist the consumer to manage these changes and situations. Ask if others have any questions, comments, or additional suggestions.
5. After all the presentations are completed, thank all the teams and distribute Handout 3.4, “Changes in the Body Systems As We Age, and How You Can Assist Elders to Manage the Changes,” including Handouts 3.4a to 3.4g.

ACTIVITY 3.5 Summary

15 minutes

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this activity, participants will be able to:

- Identify what assumptions they had about aging that were incorrect.
- State at least one new fact about aging learned in this module.

Key Content

- ❖ Correcting the pre-test may show participants things they have learned about aging through this module, and opinions that they previously held about working with elders that may have started to change.
- ❖ The basic principles of working with elders are to:
 - Assist them to stay healthy
 - Assist them to stay active
 - Be patient
 - Be alert to changes that should be recorded and reported
 - Keep a safe environment
 - Keep oneself healthy

Activity Steps

Interactive Presentation (5-10 minutes)

1. Ask participants to find the pre-test they completed at the beginning of the module. Briefly discuss each item and state whether it is true or false. Encourage questions, since many of these answers are based on opinions.

⇒ Teaching Tip

See *Instructor's Guide*: “Answers: Myths and Truths about Aging” for answers.

2. Ask if anyone’s opinions have changed since the beginning of the module. Note that it is important to be aware of our own opinions and the ways they may affect our relationships with people. It is also important to be open to changing our opinions based on new information or experiences that we may have.

Large-group exercise: Go-Round (5-10 minutes)

3. Ask participants to briefly share the most important thing they learned from this module.
4. Distribute and review Handout 3.5, “Summary – Caring for Older Consumers,” as a summary to this module.

Instructor's Guide, Activity 3.3
Experiential Station Instructions

Prepare the following instruction cards for each experiential station.

Station 1:

Put on both of the rubber gloves with cotton balls in the fingertips. Try to: 1) take a dime out of the change purse (return the dime!!); and 2) open a package of breath mints.

Station 2.

Put on both of the rubber gloves with cotton balls in the fingertips. Try to thread a needle.

Station 3:

Cover your eyes with a bandana or headband. Take a walk with your partner around the room. Your partner should hold onto your elbow for guidance.

Station 4:

Person 1. Put cotton balls in your ears. Ask your partner for directions to her house or how to make her favorite recipe.

Person 2. Give your partner directions. Speak softly and mumble. Do not let her see your mouth (put your hand over your mouth or turn your head).

Station 5.

Person 1. Put on the goggles.

Person 2. Tell your partner to look for a small object in the shoebox. You should tell her which object.

Station 6.

Person 1. Put on the goggles. Try to read the newspaper to your partner.

Person 2. Listen to your partner as she reads. Ask her to hurry – don't read so slowly!

Instructor's Guide, Activity 3.5

Answers: Myths and Truths about Aging

1. Older adults can't learn new things or deal with changes.

False:

Older adults can learn new skills, though it may take longer than when they were younger. With help and support from others, they can adjust to new situations or changes.

2. It is normal for elders to be confused about what's going on.

False:

Being confused may be a sign of illness and should be reported.

3. Sex and intimacy are not important for elders.

False

The need for a warm and caring relationship, with physical affection that may include sex, stays with us all our lives, and may even get stronger for some of us as we age. Elders are capable of having sex and experiencing sexual pleasure, though the frequency of sex may decrease.

4. Even healthy elders should avoid getting exercise in order to save energy.

False

Light or moderate exercise is important to maintaining health throughout our lives. Resting during activities may be helpful to keep up energy, or going at a slower pace, but activity itself is good.

5. Older adults don't care anymore about looking good.

False

Concern about how we look does not change as we get older.

3. Most elders are sick and in nursing homes.

False

In 2006, only 4.3 percent of elders were living in nursing homes or other institutions.

7. People usually get shorter as they get older.

True

Many people do get shorter as they age, because the spine very gradually gets shorter.

8. Older people have trouble hearing, seeing, and keeping their balance.

True and False

Problems with hearing and vision are common for elders. However, losing one's balance is a sign of illness and should be recorded and reported.

9. Losing control over the bowel or bladder is a normal part of aging.

False

Problems with bowel or bladder control may happen but are not considered normal and should be recorded and reported.

10. Most older people act very much alike.

False

Like people of all ages, elders are unique individuals, who experience the changes of aging in very different ways and who act very differently.

Module 3 Handouts Working with Elders

Activity 3.1: Building Empathy

Handout 3.1 Myths and Truths about Aging

Handout 3.2 Warning: When I Am an Old Woman, I Shall Wear Purple

Activity 3.2: Physical Changes as We Age

Handout 3.3 Changes in the Body as We Age

Activity 3.4: Helping Consumers to Manage Physical Changes of Aging

Handout 3.4 Changes in Body Systems as We Age, and How You Can Assist Elders to Manage the Changes

Handout 3.4a Circulatory System

Handout 3.4b Digestive System

Handout 3.4c

Module 3. Working with Elders

Nervous System

Handout 3.4d Respiratory System

Handout 3.4e Skeletomuscular System

Handout 3.4f The Skin

Handout 3.4g Urinary and Reproductive Systems

Activity 3.5: Summary

Handout 3.5 Summary: Caring for Older Consumers

Handout 3.1—Myths and Truths about Aging

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Decide whether each statement is true or false. Then write T for true or F for false.

1. _____ Older adults can't learn new things or deal with changes.
2. _____ It is normal for elders to be often confused about what's going on.
3. _____ Sex and intimacy are not important for elders.
4. _____ Even healthy elders should avoid getting exercise in order to save energy.
5. _____ Older adults don't care anymore about looking good.
6. _____ Most elders are sick and in nursing homes.
7. _____ People usually get shorter as they get older.
8. _____ Older people have trouble hearing, seeing, and keeping their balance.
9. _____ Losing control over the bowel or bladder is a normal part of aging.
10. _____ Most older people act very much alike.

Handout 3.2—Warning: When I Am an Old Woman, I Shall Wear Purple

Page 1 of 1

When I am an old woman, I shall wear purple
With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.
And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves
And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.

I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired
And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells
And run my stick along the public railings
And make up for the sobriety of my youth.

I shall go out in my slippers in the rain
And pick the flowers in other peoples' gardens
And learn to spit.

You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat
And eat three pounds of sausages at a go
Or only bread and pickles for a week
And hoard pens and pencils and beer-mats and things in boxes.

But now we must have clothes that keep us dry
And pay our rent and not swear in the street
And set a good example for the children.
We must have friends to dinner and read the papers.

But maybe I ought to practice a little now?

So people who know me are not too shocked and surprised
When suddenly I am old, and start to wear purple.

~ **Jenny Joseph** ~

From *Warning: When I am an Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple* (Souvenir Press, 2001)

Handout 3.3—Changes in the Body as We Age

Page 1 of 2

As we get older, our bodies change. Here's how.

1. How do our senses change?

We cannot smell as well.

We cannot taste as well – lots of foods taste the same.

We cannot feel as much with our skin.

We cannot see as well.

- It takes our eyes longer to adjust to changes in lighting.
- It's harder to see at night.

We cannot hear as well.

- We may have trouble hearing high sounds.

2. How does the way we look change?

Our nails get thicker and tougher.

Our body gets shorter.

Our eyes sink in more.

Our skin:

- Bruises easily
- Gets age spots and wrinkles
- Looks clear, pale, and thin

Handout 3.3—Changes in the Body as We Age

Page 2 of 2

Our hair:

- Falls out
- Turns gray

Our weight changes.

- Men often gain weight until age 50, and then lose it.
- Women often gain weight until age 70, and then lose it.

3. How does the way our body works change?

The heart does not work as well. We get tired faster.

It takes us longer to:

- Heal, or get better after being sick
- React
- Think

We have more trouble:

- Digesting food
- Keeping our balance
- Sleeping

Our bones get weaker. They break more easily.

Our muscles get weaker.

Handout 3.4—Changes in Body Systems as We Age and How You Can Assist Elders to Manage the Changes

Page 1 of 1

In order to help elder consumers to manage the normal changes of aging, it is good to know what's happening in each body system.

This section describes the “Common Changes” for each body system and some “Common Situations” that happen due to those changes. “How You Can Assist Elders to Manage Changes of Aging” talks about your role in assisting elders to continue living their normal lives.

Handout 3.4a—Circulatory System

Page 1 of 2

COMMON CHANGES

As people age, the flow of blood changes.

- The heart gets weaker and doesn't work as well.
- Tubes that carry blood get harder and more narrow.
This slows the flow of blood.

COMMON SITUATIONS

Because of these changes, older people often:

- Feel cold, especially in their hands and feet
- Have a fast heartbeat when they get upset
- Are short of breath after doing things

Handout 3.4a—Circulatory System

Page 2 of 2

HOW YOU CAN ASSIST ELDERS TO MANAGE CHANGES OF AGING

To help with blood flow, ask the consumer to:

- Avoid crossing their legs and wearing tight clothes
- Avoid things that upset them
- Move around
- Put their legs up
- Soak their feet in warm water, or take a warm bath

If the consumer is cold, ask them to:

- Dress in layers
- Eat and drink warm things
- Turn up the heat, or use an extra blanket. But do **not** offer hot water bottles or heating pads.

To help with shortness of breath:

- Take their time doing activities
- Rest every so often

Handout 3.4b—Digestive System

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COMMON CHANGES

As people age, their eating and digestion change.

- They have fewer taste buds.
- They feel less thirsty.
- They may lose teeth or have dentures that don't fit well. This makes it hard to eat some foods.
- They have less saliva.
- Food stays in the stomach longer.
- The muscles of the large bowel do not work as well.
- They feel less of an urge to empty their bowel.

COMMON SITUATIONS

Because of these changes, older people often:

- Have a dry mouth
- Have gas, bloating, or stomach pain
- Have hard bowel movements
- Lose teeth

Handout 3.4b—Digestive System

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HOW YOU CAN ASSIST ELDERS TO MANAGE CHANGES OF AGING

If the consumer does not want to eat:

- Offer them snacks.
- Make food look better and have more flavor.

If the consumer does not want to drink, or has hard bowel movements:

- Offer them small amounts of fluids often.

To help with dry mouth:

- Ask the consumer to drink before taking pills.

To keep teeth healthy:

- Offer mouth care often.

If the consumer has trouble digesting, ask them to:

- Eat 6 to 8 small meals each day, if their care plan says to
- Eat foods that are high in fiber, if their care plan says to
- Avoid foods that are spicy or could cause gas
- Eat slowly and chew well
- Sit up for 30 minutes after eating
- Take plenty of time to empty their bowel

Handout 3.4c—Nervous System

Page 1 of 3

COMMON CHANGES

As people age, their brain and nerves change.

- Nerve cells die.
- The senses don't work as well.

COMMON SITUATIONS

Because of these changes, older people often have trouble:

- Coping with change
- Falling asleep
- Getting used to changes in light
- Going up and down stairs
- Keeping their balance
- Learning and recalling new things
- Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling things

Handout 3.4c—Nervous System

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HOW YOU CAN ASSIST ELDERS TO MANAGE CHANGES OF AGING

If the consumer forgets things easily:

- Ask them to write things down.
- Give them clues to help them remember.
- Give them puzzles and mental challenges for practice.

If the consumer loses their balance easily:

- Ask them to use handrails, if possible.
- Ask them to change position slowly. Count to 10 after they get up, then assist them to walk.
- Give them plenty of time to get around.

If the consumer has trouble getting to sleep:

- Ask them to move around during the day.
- Offer them a back rub and warm milk before bed, if possible.
- Ask them to avoid coffee, tea, chocolate, and alcohol before bed.

If a consumer has trouble seeing:

- Ask them to wait for their eyes to get used to changes in light.
- Make sure they have plenty of light and a clear path.
- Do **not** move things around in their room.
- Ask them to get their eyes checked and wear their glasses.
- Assist them to find their way, if needed.

Handout 3.4c—Nervous System

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If a consumer has trouble hearing:

- Speak clearly.
- Get close to them when you talk.
- Ask them to get their ears checked and wear their hearing aid.

Handout 3.4e—Respiratory System

Page 1 of 1

COMMON CHANGES

As people age, their breathing changes.

- They don't breathe out carbon dioxide and take in oxygen as well as before.
- Their breathing tubes can get clogged with mucous.

COMMON SITUATIONS

Because of these changes, elders often:

- Have trouble breathing when they move around
- Cough more and may cough up mucous

HOW YOU CAN ASSIST ELDERS TO MANAGE CHANGES OF AGING

To help with shortness of breath:

- Take their time doing activities
- Rest every so often
- Ask a respiratory therapist to teach the consumer how to breathe and cough better.

Handout 3.4e—Skeletomuscular System

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COMMON CHANGES

As people age, their muscles, bones, and joints change.

- The spine gets shorter. The upper spine may become curved. The head may bend forward.
- Bones lose calcium and get weaker.
- Muscles get weaker and less stretchy.
- Joints get stiff, especially after sleep or rest.

COMMON SITUATIONS

Because of these changes, elders often:

- Break bones easily
- Feel joint and muscle pain
- Get tired easily
- Have trouble taking off and putting on lids and lifting heavy cups
- Need more time to do things

Handout 3.4e—Skeletomuscular System

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HOW YOU CAN ASSIST CONSUMERS TO MANAGE CHANGES OF AGING

Ask the consumer to:

- Move their joints and muscles, if their care plan says to
- Eat foods and drinks with calcium, such as milk products, if their care plan says to
- Rest and take their time doing activities
- Try using plastic cups with handles. Fill the cups only half full to make them lighter and prevent spills.

Make sure the consumer:

- Can reach the things they use often
- Has a clear path
- Has plenty of light
- Has strong furniture

Handout 3.4f—The Skin

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COMMON CHANGES

As people age, their skin changes.

- Fat under the skin moves to different places. Elbows, hipbones, and shoulder blades stick out more.
- Glands do not make as much oil.
- The skin sags and doesn't stretch back.
- Tubes that carry blood can be seen more easily.
- Fingernails get ridged and break easily. Toenails get hard and thick.

COMMON SITUATIONS

Because of these changes, elders often:

- Break fingernails easily
- Get wrinkles and dry skin
- Get cuts and sores easily
- Take longer to heal

Handout 3.4f—The Skin

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HOW YOU CAN ASSIST CONSUMERS TO MANAGE CHANGES OF AGING

When the consumer bathes:

- Use only a little soap.
- Touch the consumer's skin gently. Pat dry with a towel.
- Put lotion on their skin after bathing. Avoid lotions that have alcohol, since they tend to dry skin.
- Do **not** use bath oils, since these could cause a fall.
- Do **not** bathe them every day, unless their care plan says to.

To care for nails:

- Assist the consumer to file their fingernails. Put on lotion to soften nails.
- Do **not** cut fingernails (unless you are a certified aide or are working in a consumer-directed setting). Report that they need to be cut.
- Do **not** cut or file toenails (unless you are a certified aide or are working in a consumer-directed setting). Report that they need to be cut.

Handout 3.4g—Urinary & Reproductive Systems

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COMMON CHANGES

As people age, their bladder and male and female parts change.

- The bladder muscles get weaker and more stretched.
- A man's prostate gland usually gets bigger.
- There is less fat in a woman's breasts and in the lips of her vulva.
- The woman's vagina makes less mucous.
- Women stop producing eggs during menopause, but men produce sperm for most of their lives.
- Men may need more time to get an erection.
- There is no change in sexual desire and pleasure.

COMMON SITUATIONS

Because of these changes, elders may:

- Have trouble holding their urine
- Get up several times each night to empty their bladder
- May have a dry vagina during sex (women)
- Still want to have sexual relations, but have to deal with social attitudes against elders having sex
- May have trouble getting privacy to have sex

- **Handout 3.4g—Urinary & Reproductive Systems**

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HOW YOU CAN ASSIST ELDERS TO MANAGE CHANGES OF AGING

If the consumer has bladder or bowel accidents, ask them to avoid:

- Drinking coffee, tea, colas, and alcohol after dinner
- Eating salty or spicy foods for dinner, since these can make them thirsty
- Taking hot tub baths
- Wearing pants with buttons and zippers

If the consumer has accidents:

- Assist them to get to the toilet at least every 2 hours.
- Assist them to use a commode or bedpan.
- Make sure they have a clear path to the bathroom.
- Put a commode in their bedroom.
- Put on a night-light.

Support the consumer's right to continue their sexual relationships.

- Respect the consumer's needs for intimacy with chosen partners
- Respect the consumer's needs for privacy
- Respectfully educate the consumer about possible need for lubrication for the woman and longer time for the man to get erect

Handout 3.5—Summary: Caring for Older Consumers

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There is a lot to know about assisting consumers to manage the normal changes of aging. But there are some basic principles to guide you. Read these tips from other workers.

Syd's tip – Assist elders to stay healthy.

“Eating right and drinking plenty of fluids is good for every body system! Plus, I encourage people to get plenty of rest and take vitamins, if it’s in their care plan.”

Alicia's tips – Assist elders to stay active.

“I urge people to do as much for themselves as they can. Plus, I ask them to move their bodies as much as their care plan says to.”

Gina's tip – Be patient.

“I give people plenty of time to do things. It helps to pace them – a little work, a little rest.”

Nan's tip – Be alert.

“I keep a close eye on people. I tell my supervisor if I see any problems with their body or mind.”

Garth's tip – Be safe.

“I pick up the floor and give people plenty of light, so they won't trip. And I follow the rules to keep germs from spreading.”

Handout 3.5—Summary: Caring for Older Consumers

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Ben's tip – Keep yourself healthy, too!

“Elders are more likely to get sick as they get older. The last thing they need is for me to get sick and bring my germs to work with me! So I try to stay healthy, too, and I report out when I’m sick.”

To review:

- Assist elders to stay healthy.
- Assist elders to stay active.
- Be patient.
- Be alert.
- Be safe.
- Keep yourself healthy, too.