

Quiz shows many myths about aging are just that

There are many myths and misconceptions concerning the aging process and aging people. Unfortunately these myths and erroneous beliefs often tend to perpetuate themselves and influence the way we perceive aging and aging adults. The following true or false questions may help to clear up some negative ideas about aging. The answers are at the bottom of the column.

1. The majority of people past 65 are senile. T F
2. In general most older adults are all alike. T F
3. People naturally realize when they are old. T F
4. As people age they tend to get irritable, critical and demanding. T F

5. About 80 percent of the aged are healthy enough to carry out their normal activities. T F
6. Older workers have fewer accidents than younger workers. T F
7. As people age they have more difficulty adjusting to change. T F
8. Most older people are lonely and would like to live with their children. T F
9. Older people tend to be more religious as they age. T F
10. Most people over 65 live in long-term institutions. T F
11. Older people have little or no interest in sex. T F
12. Older people cannot learn new things. T F

consumer mailbag

Q. Do you have any quick stress-reduction techniques I can use when things start to get tense?

A. No matter how well organized and ahead of schedule you try to be, stressful moments can occur. Stress is everywhere, from last minute appointments to crowded malls to social functions. The trick is to learn to master the stress and use it.

Under stress, the body mobilizes a "fight or flight" response similar to the response used by early humans when confronted with life-threatening situations. These responses include rapid pulse, rising blood pressure and tensed muscles.

IN THE past, it was thought that these were involuntary responses



Terry Gibb

that could not be controlled. Medical researchers have found now that these responses — heart rate, breathing, blood pressure and body temperature — can be controlled through relaxation methods. These methods result in less tension and less likelihood of developing stress-related illnesses, such as headaches, backaches or hypertension.

Relaxation techniques require both mind and body involvement.

on aging



Renee Mahler

13. After 65 most people face a decline in their physical and mental health. T F
14. The majority of older adults do some type of work daily. T F
15. The majority of older people feel miserable most of the time. T F
16. More of the aged vote than any other age group. T F
17. Aged drivers have fewer accidents than younger drivers. T F
18. Older people who reduce their activities are happier than those who do not. T F
19. The majority of older people are seldom irritated or angry. T F
20. The aging are the fastest growing segment of our population and the fastest growing age group is that

They require concentration and the ability to let go and surrender anxiety-producing thoughts and feelings. There is no one best relaxation technique. Individual preference will determine the best one for you.

DEEP BREATHING:
This technique can be done anywhere there is somewhere to sit. Sit down and make yourself comfortable. Keep your back straight, placing your hands on your thighs with thumbs touching. Do not cross your legs. Close your eyes. Try not to move during the exercise. Now take a deep breath. As you inhale as much as possible, count "one" to yourself. Then as you very slowly exhale, count "two" to yourself. Continue breathing and counting to 10. Ignore any thoughts that might pop in and concentrate on counting. Breathing exercises also can include imagery or visualization exercises. While breathing, the person pictures a peaceful setting. Counting

and/or mental imagery helps shift the mind from externally oriented, logical thoughts through the constant repetition of the image.

PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION:
Progressive relaxation is a good technique for people who have trouble pinpointing what makes them tense and where the tension is stored in their body. With progressive relaxation, the person tenses and relaxes a different part of the body at a time, starting with the toes and ending at the head. Pay particular attention to shoulder and neck muscles where tension tends to develop. It's important to realize that total relaxation is hard to achieve. Patience — not the "I want it now" attitude — is more likely to bring results. Start practicing these techniques for five to 10 minutes a day now. Then when a stressful situation occurs, you'll be able to control it.

of 85 and older.

Answers

1. False. Dementia is not a natural process of aging.
2. False. Older adults, just like everyone else, are individuals.
3. False. Everyone's perception of themselves is different.
4. False. People who are irritable, critical and demanding have probably always been that way.
5. True.
6. True.
7. False. Older people are extremely adaptable and take many things in stride.
8. False. Most older adults are fiercely independent and want to remain that way.
9. False.
10. False.
11. False. Many a great romance occurs in one's later years.
12. False. Older people may take more time to learn, but their mental capacities are not necessarily diminished.
13. False. Some do, some don't.
14. True. It may be in the job mar-

ket, at home or in volunteer positions.

15. False.
16. True.
17. True.
18. False. All of us, regardless of our age, need to be involved in activities that are beneficial to our well-being.
19. True.
20. True.

I hope that some of these answers came as a surprise to you and I sincerely hope that your thoughts and ideas about aging and older people have taken a new direction. It is best to remember that each individual should be judged as such regardless of their chronological age. We are not all alike. Wouldn't life be boring if we were?

Renee Mahler is a gerontologist and the director of communications and admissions at a Rochester Hills nursing facility. Send your questions to her at *Observer & Eccentric*, 805 East Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009.

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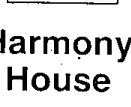
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