

Normal Changes Associated with Aging vs. Symptoms of Disease

Despite our best efforts to stay healthy, many of us will experience some form of physical illness or disability as we grow older. It is important to understand the normal changes associated with aging and changes that may indicate a disease. The chart below explains some of the differences.

Sense/System	Normal Changes with Aging	May Be Symptoms of Disease
Eyes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Need bifocals to see small print and objects >Need more light to see >Difficulty adjusting between bright and dim light >Sharpness of vision decreases >Difficulty distinguishing subtle color differences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Sudden occurrence of vision changes, e.g., flashes of light, partial blindness, dark spots >Tunnel vision (loss of peripheral vision) or the opposite (loss of central vision) >Blurriness and haziness >Halos around lights >Blood in the eye >Severe, aching pain in the eye
Ears	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Hearing loss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Ringing or noise in the ear >Dizziness and problems with balance
Mouth and Teeth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Dry mouth and receding gums >Lessening of sense of taste and smell 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Bleeding gums >White spots, sores, or bleeding in the mouth
Skin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Dry skin >Wrinkles and age spots >Cuts and bruises take longer to heal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Changes in size, shape, or color of a mole >Slow-healing wounds
Bones, Joints, Muscles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Muscle strength declines >Bone mass decreases >Joints become less flexible and range of motion decreases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Pain, stiffness, and swelling in joints >Hip pain >Falling >Inability to get up from a fall
Endocrine System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >No notable changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Excessive thirst >Frequent urination >Unexplained weight loss >Persistent fatigue

<p>Chest and Lungs</p>	<p>>Lungs become less elastic, making it more difficult to cough >Lung capacity decreases</p>	<p>>Shortness of breath >Coughing up blood >Rapid, shallow, labored breathing</p>
<p>Heart and Circulation</p>	<p>>Cold hands and feet due to reduced blood flow >Varicose veins</p>	<p>>Acute symptoms associated with heart attack, stroke and other emergencies, such as chest pain, dizziness, and shortness of breath</p>
<p>Nervous System</p>	<p>>Occasional forgetfulness >Taking a bit longer to recall a name or the location of an object</p>	<p>>Increasing forgetfulness accompanied by personality changes >Confusion about familiar things, like routines or the names of common objects >Inability to remember a short name or number long enough to write it down</p>
<p>Emotional/Psychological</p>	<p>>Occasional sadness or feelings of loss >Loneliness or “seasonal blues” >Grief response to death or change</p>	<p>>Sadness that does not go away >Feeling “stuck” in a grief reaction >Talk of suicide >Inability to sleep on consistent basis >Signs of paranoia</p>
		
		