

YOUR TIME

Adjusting to aging

Everyone deserves as full and satisfying a life as possible. It is not easy to see a loved one gradually closed in by limitations. To help your elderly relatives adjust to aging, you must understand the aging process and their responsibilities, take time for yourself, and seek help when needed.

What to expect

The health of older adults may change slowly or rapidly. The extent of care needed depends on the individual. It is important to recognize the physical, emotional, social and financial changes your loved one is going through. Encourage older adults to take good physical and emotional care of them-selves, eat well, exercise and take medications as prescribed. Feeling comfortable with a trusted physician and having regular check-ups is also helpful.

Many transitions in a short time

In the natural aging process there may be a decrease in overall stamina, slower reflexes and altered sleeping patterns. Older adults experience many transitions in a short time. Loss of spouse or friends, health and independence all may cause stress and grief and require adjustment. It is normal to grieve the loss of these things. Adult children need to be aware that these transitions are a natural part of aging.

When caring for your older relatives, encourage them to make decisions affecting their own lives. Helping your elderly relatives remain as independent as possible is worth your effort.

Visit, write or call regularly to stay in touch, and be sure to involve older relatives in holiday and family celebrations. Encourage your loved ones to volunteer, keep up their hobbies or learn new ones, and keep in touch with friends, and grandchildren.

If help is needed, some organizations specialize in aiding the elderly. Services include transportation, meals, home nursing care and household help. It will benefit no one if you do it all yourself, only to be overwhelmed and exhausted.

What you can do to adjust

For more ideas, consider these tips:

- **Visit senior centers.** They can offer companionship through outings, lectures and other structured activities.
- **Stay in touch.** Let your elderly relatives know you care.
- **Get involved.** Look in the Yellow Pages under "Senior Citizens."
- **Stay healthy.** Take care of medical and emotional problems as they arise.
- **Call your Community Mental Health Center.** They can help with difficult feelings.
- **Educate yourself.** Learn more about the aging process.
- **Be flexible.** Have realistic expectations for your aging parent or friend or for yourself.

If you need help

If you need more help coping with a relative who is aging, talk to a friend, relative or clergy. Or talk to a counselor, whose objective viewpoint can help you sort things out. To make an appointment, call (810) 257-3742. In an emergency, call Crisis Services at (810) 257-3740 or toll free at (877) 346-3648

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