

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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## “Interesting Facts About Aging”

Overall, most of the myths surrounding age seem to center on inevitability. People believe that it is inevitable that they will gradually deteriorate into dust as their lives become increasingly unbearable, boring, passionless, and painful. But, admittedly, certain aspects of health do decline with age. Examples of aging-associated diseases are atherosclerosis and cardiovascular disease, cancer, arthritis, cataracts, osteoporosis, type 2 diabetes, hypertension and Alzheimer's disease. The incidence of all of these diseases increases exponentially with age. Physiological changes occur with aging in all organ systems. The cardiac output decreases, blood pressure increases, and arteriosclerosis develops. The lungs show impaired gas exchange, a decrease in vital capacity and slower expiratory flow rates. When you reach your sixties, your skin turns drier and itchier and may look like crepe paper or tissue. Wrinkles, age spots, creases, and bruises become more noticeable. Your sweat glands also get less active. That means you might not sweat as much, but wounds on your skin may take longer to heal. Also, certain things can cause us to age faster. Hormone changes, environmental factors, genetics, and your diet all play a role in how quickly we age. Cardiovascular disease remains the most common cause of death of older adults, although death rates have dropped in the last 20 years. At what age are we considered “old?” A typical woman in the United States is old at age 73, and a typical man at age 70. Although it is uncomfortable, “We are programmed to die.” Certain foods reportedly speed up the body's aging process, such as fries, white bread, white sugar, margarine, processed meats, dairy, caffeine plus sugar and alcohol. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “Between 2000 and 2050, the proportion of the world's population over 60 years will double from about 11% to 22%.” Many ask, “At what age are people the happiest?” In terms of their physical appearance, people are least happy from 55 to 59 and reach their happiest after the age of 70. And overall happiness actually peaks at two different points, according to the data: once at age 23 and again at 69. People reported the lowest levels of happiness in their mid-50s. And please remember that dementia is definitely not inevitable.

In the America that I love, we know that unlike the changes of adolescence, which are predictable to within a few years, each person ages at a unique rate. Some systems begin aging as early as age 30. Other aging processes are not common until much later in life. Some research suggests that merely *expecting* physical deterioration increases the likelihood that someone will physically deteriorate. So, do the best with what you've got and always keep a positive attitude.

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