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Health Risk Factors of Aged People

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Abstract – Most of us have been exposed to individuals who have developed a chronic disease and are aware of the excellent treatment they have received from our technologically sophisticated medical community. Today, physicians and hospitals are equipped with a wide array of diagnostic tools, advanced surgical techniques, medicines, and drugs to treat some of the major chronic diseases. In many cases, what may have been a fatal disease in the past now has a favorable prognosis for partial or complete recovery. Medical advances have been phenomenal during the first fifty to sixty years of this century and have been instrumental in eradicating many of the previous causes of premature death.

Physiological changes associated with the aging process. A number of physiological changes occur during the natural aging process. Some of the changes, such as decreased visual ability, are not too preventable. However, others, such as decreased cardiovascular functions, may be prevented to some degree by a Positive Health Life Style.

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INTRODUCTION

As a young college student, most of your concerns about the quality of your physical and mental health are probably grounded in the present. Basically, you want to look good physically and feel good mentally – now. You probably do not spend a great deal of time worrying about the distant future, such as whether or not you will develop heart disease, cancer, or diabetes how you will take care of yourself during your retirement years, or how long you are going to live. However, such thoughts may have crossed your mind at one time or another. Moreover, if you are older than the typical college aged student (eighteen to twenty four), these thoughts may have become increasingly important to you.

CHRONOLOGICAL AND FUNCTIONAL AGE

Although we age in different ways, we all begin to age from the first day of conception. Chronological age represents the passage of time. It is marked by our birthday each year and is relatively easy to determine. Functional age represents the capacity of the body to perform certain specific tasks and is usually evaluated in a variety of ways, such as tests of vision and hearing, physiological functioning during exercise, psychomotor ability, and health status.

In a general sense, there is a rather close relationship between chronological and functional age. For example, in terms of overall metabolism, our first twenty years of life are characterized by a dominance of anabolic processes in which the skeleton, muscles, brain, and other body systems grow and develop. This anabolic phase is usually completed in the late teens or early twenties, the time of life when we are normally at our peak functional age in relationship to physical health and physical performance characteristics such as strength, power, and endurance. Following this anabolic phase are the maintenance and catabolic phases of metabolism, wherein the body systems are maintained at an optimal functioning level and then begin to deteriorate (catabolize) as the body gets older. Many of these catabolic changes are used as determinants of functional age. In general, in adulthood, an older functional age is characterized by poorer health status and physiological performance.

THE AGING PROCESS

- Vision becomes worse
- Hearing acuity fades
- Heart and lungs become less efficient
- Skin dries out and wrinkles
- Muscles get smaller and lose strength
- Joints become less flexible

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during the natural aging process. Some of the changes, such as decreased visual ability, are not too preventable. However, others, such as decreased cardiovascular functions, may be prevented to some degree by a Positive Health Life Style.

RISK FACTORS

Since your functional age may be evaluated on the basis of your health status, usually determined by the number of health risks you possess, it is often referred to as your risk age. Over the years, scientists in the field of epidemiology have identified a number of life-style factors considered to be health risks.

A risk factor is a health behavior or personal characteristic that has been associated with a particular disease. A cause-and-effect relationship does not have to be present in order to label a particular factor as a risk to health, but some form of statistical relationship between the risk factor and the presence of the disease in a given population group should be evident.

With some risk factors, a direct cause-and-effect relationship can be observed. The results of epidemiological research often stimulate experimental research in order t6o establish a cause-and-effect relationship. For example, experimental studies with humans have shown significant deteriorative effects in liver function tests with the consumption of excessive amounts of alcohol over a short period of time, while experimentation with animals over a longer period of time has shown that liver. Experimental research currently is being conducted with many risk factors in order to help establish such cause-and-effect relationships.

CONCLUSION

Most of us have been exposed to individuals who have developed a chronic disease and are aware of the excellent treatment they have received from our technologically sophisticated medical community. Today, physicians and hospitals are equipped with a wide array of diagnostic tools, advanced surgical techniques, medicines, and drugs to treat some of the major chronic diseases. In many cases, what may have been a fatal disease in the past now has a favourable prognosis for partial or complete recovery. Medical advances have been phenomenal during the first fifty to sixty years of this century and have been instrumental in eradicating many of the previous causes of premature death.

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