

healthkeys®

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Who's old?

By Angela Menghraj, Contributing Editor

Not too long ago, people generally thought old age began at 68. Today, the consensus is old age begins at 80. But who's to say? Do you find yourself looking at gray haired people, perhaps like yourself, and comparing them to yourself, all the while wondering how old they are? The conversation begins when we see those first white hairs or another wrinkle on ourselves.

Among the Pew Old Age Survey respondents who were ages 65 to 74, only 21 percent said they feel old. It seems most people over 75 feel old age happens sometime in their future. Even among those ages 75 and older, just 35 percent said they feel old. As the saying goes, "you're as young as you feel." It's interesting that men and women see aging differently. An average of women believe old age begins at 70. According to the Pew Study, men on average say old age begins at 66.

The majority of people think the results of the study refer to other people. Have you ever found yourself comfortably hugging a pole on the subway when someone offers you a seat? You might feel slightly affronted. "Do I look that old?"

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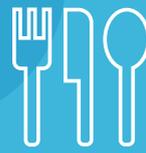
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Quiz: Cancer risks and myths



You're probably aware that smoking can increase your risk of developing certain cancers, but what about diet, stress and being overweight? Do these things affect your cancer risk? The amount of conflicting information floating around can be confusing. And according to a survey by the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR), fewer than half of Americans are aware of some of the major lifestyle risk factors that can affect their cancer risk. Are you one of them? This quiz sheds light on lifestyle risk factors and debunks some cancer myths that have little to no scientific evidence. HK

Eating bacon and other processed meats every week doesn't increase my risk of cancer, as long as I maintain a healthy weight.

True

False

1

Skin cancer is one of the most preventable cancers.

True

False

6

Too much stress can lead to cancer.

True

False

2

Immunizations can protect against certain cancers.

True

False

7

Eating plenty of fruits and vegetables can reduce my risk of colorectal cancer.

True

False

3

Exercise may help me lose weight, but there's no evidence it prevents cancer.

True

False

8

Artificial sweeteners may cause cancer.

True

False

4

Using an aluminum-based antiperspirant causes breast cancer.

True

False

9

If one of my parents had cancer, it's likely I'll get cancer, too.

True

False

5

A diet high in salt can increase my cancer risk.

True

False

10

ANSWERS

- 1. False.** Consuming processed meats such as bacon and hot dogs on a regular basis can increase your risk of colorectal cancer. Preservatives and the process of curing or smoking these meats results in the formation of cancer-causing substances (carcinogens). Reduce your risk by swapping processed meats for poultry or fish.
- 2. False.** Although too much stress certainly isn't a good thing, there's no strong scientific evidence that it leads to cancer.
- 3. True.** Evidence shows that a diet high in fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains reduces the risk of developing certain cancers, including colorectal cancer.
- 4. False.** Although a study conducted in the 1970s linked high levels of saccharin to bladder cancer in rats, numerous other studies since then have found no evidence that artificial sweeteners cause cancer or other health problems. And artificial sweeteners have been deemed safe by the AICR, National Cancer Institute and other health agencies.
- 5. False.** Although some cancers are associated with genetic predisposition, research suggests that 90–95 percent of cancers are non-hereditary, meaning they don't result directly from a single faulty gene inherited from one's parents.
- 6. True.** Skin cancer, one of the most common forms of cancer, is preventable if you wear sunscreen and avoid tanning beds. You should also avoid prolonged exposure to midday sun and seek shade as much as possible.
- 7. True.** Chronic infection with the hepatitis B virus can increase your risk of developing liver cancer. Human papillomavirus (HPV) can cause cervical and other genital cancers, as well as head and neck cancers. You can reduce your risk by getting vaccinated against these viruses. Talk to your doctor about whether you would benefit from vaccination.
- 8. False.** Exercising at least 30 minutes every day has numerous health benefits, including lowering your risk of developing breast and colon cancer.
- 9. False.** There is no conclusive evidence that links breast cancer risk to antiperspirant or deodorant use.
- 10. True.** Consuming too much salt (sodium) can increase your risk of developing stomach cancer. The AICR recommends limiting your intake to 1 teaspoon of salt a day.

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PERSPECTIVES ON AGING

Coping with change is a lifelong activity. The impermanence of life stares us in the face as we change with time. The loss of family and friends through death and the loss of our own health can be the greatest changes we experience as we age. Yet there are people who look at change in a life-affirming way. Instead of focusing on the loss of family and close friends, they look forward to making the most of what life has to offer and what they can offer life. They reconnect with distant friends and relatives while knowing those they have lost cannot be replaced. Everything depends on how they choose to see the inevitable changes life brings.

We know the ultimate change difficult to confront is our own death. It is so distressing that we foolishly imagine others will die and we will remain intact and go on just as we are. "I don't want to think about it." No amount of denial will allow us to escape the inevitability of death. There is a benefit to living life's moments aware of the value of life now.

So we can play with our illusions and avoid preparing for our own leave-taking from this life, "Great Change." Or we can decide to be aware of the needs of those around us by having an open door in communicating with family and friends. It's a sure and fearless crowning of a life well-lived. Perhaps our question should be not "Who's old?" but "How well am I living in this moment?" 



Check it out!

Alive & Well: A positive Aging Support group focusing on the value of positivity and how it affects the way we age. Join us on Tuesday mornings from 9:30 to 10:30 am. Group is confidential and mutually supportive.

For information, contact Marilyn Pacheco at **(212) 342-9224** or mpacheco@isabella.org.

“Circle of Care” program at Isabella helps family caregivers

When Anna was visiting her mother in Florida, she noticed changes. Her mother would remark “something is wrong with my brain.” Anna brushed this off for a while. Then she began to notice a book her mother was reading on improving memory. Months later, the companion who was caring for her mother announced that she would be leaving.

Anna flew to Florida and brought her mother back to New York to live with her. A friend recommended a woman who agreed to be caregiver when Anna went to work. Anna would be the caregiver at night and on weekends. Except for an out-of-state sister who provided periodic relief, the burden was all on Anna’s shoulders.

Needless to say, Anna found the demands of caregiving exhausting — and felt overwhelmed by the signs of further decline in her mother. While friends and family members offered support and encouragement, many were unable to provide the assistance needed to relieve the stress that Anna felt.

This is a scenario played out with increasing frequency throughout the country.

A GREAT NEED FOR SUPPORT SERVICES

Caregiver support services are in short supply — and the demand will only increase over time given the anticipated rise in dementia among our population.

Alzheimer’s disease is the most common form of dementia. It is a progressive disease, beginning with mild memory loss and possibly leading to the loss of the ability to carry on a conversation and respond to the environment. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 5 million people are living with Alzheimer’s disease or dementia, most of whom live at home. This number is expected to grow to 14 million within the next few decades — so the burden on caregivers will be extraordinary.

LOCAL SUPPORT AVAILABLE

Isabella is fortunate to partner with Presbyterian Senior Services in hosting a support program: “**Circle of Care.**” This program will provide education, support and one-on-one counseling for individuals who are caring for a loved one suffering from dementia.

“**Circle of Care**” is open to anyone who cares for an individual who is suffering from Alzheimer’s disease or other dementia — no matter where they live. Some of the services that will be provided are:

- Caregiver support groups — in person, by phone or online — provided by professional case managers
- Information and referrals for home care, respite care and other services
- Training and online resources about Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias
- Assistance with benefits and entitlements
- Bilingual support

Presbyterian Senior Service, a nonprofit organization with more than 50 years of service to the New York community, provides important community support through a multiyear grant it has received. With many decades of programs and services to our local community, Isabella is thrilled that our partnership with Presbyterian Senior Services will enable us to add this vital program to the services we already provide.

The “**Circle of Care**” program meets every Friday from noon to 1:30 pm, with individual counseling time available from 1:30 to 3 pm.

For more information about the “**Circle of Care**” program, contact Marilyn Pacheco at (212) 342-9224 or mpacheco@isabella.org. 

