
How the Body Ages

As the years pass, most people experience changes in the way their body functions. Some changes are obvious. For example, before age 50, most people begin to have trouble seeing objects that are up close. Other changes are hardly noticeable. For example, few people are aware that the kidneys may become less able to filter waste products out of the blood, because the kidneys usually continue to filter the blood well enough to avoid problems. Most people learn that their kidneys have aged only if a disorder develops.

Predicting how a particular person will age is hard, because each person ages at a different pace. In addition, how well a person takes care of the body influences how the person ages. Nonetheless, some changes are almost universal. Knowing what changes may be expected can help a person adjust to aging.

EYES

A change in vision is often the most undeniable sign of aging. Between the ages of 40 and 50, most people notice that seeing objects closer than 2 feet becomes difficult. This change in vision, called presbyopia, occurs because the lens in the eye stiffens. Normally, the lens changes its shape to help the eye focus. When the lens stiffens, the eye cannot easily focus on objects that are close.

Many people try to ignore presbyopia for as long as they can. But ultimately, almost everyone with presbyopia ends up wearing reading glasses. People who need glasses to see distant objects may need to wear bifocals or glasses with variable-focus lenses.

As people continue to age, vision changes in other ways. Seeing in dim light becomes more difficult. This change occurs because the lens tends to become denser. Light passes through the lens to the retina at the back of the eye. A denser lens means that less light enters the eye. Also, the retina, which contains the cells that sense light, becomes less sensitive. So for reading,