

A GUIDE FOR READERS

The Merck Manual of Health & Aging is organized into 4 sections and 66 chapters. Understanding this organization will help readers navigate the book. Topics of general interest may be quickly located by looking in the Table of Contents or the Index. When looking for a specific topic, the Index is especially likely to be helpful.

Sections

The first section, “Fundamentals of Aging,” covers three topics that set the stage: why aging occurs, how aging affects specific parts of the body, and how aging is changing the United States and world population.

The second section, “Caring for Self and Others,” shines a light on topics that help people become more active in caring for themselves or a loved one. Topics include preventive care, healthy nutrition, appropriate use of drugs, and the wide array of diagnostic tests and complementary and alternative therapies. Also included are topics about obtaining and organizing care, including communicating with doctors and other health care practitioners, a review of the continuity of health care in different settings, caregiving, and palliative and end-of-life care.

The third section, “Medical Conditions,” focuses on how disorders are different in older adults rather than discussing all aspects of disease. Some of the disorders discussed occur nearly exclusively in older adults; others occur more commonly in older adults. Still others occur in all age groups but are different in older adults.

The fourth section, “Social, Legal, and Ethical Issues,” addresses several challenging, practical concerns relating to health and health care, including coping with change, driving, intimacy in relationships, mistreatment, legal and ethical issues, and the many ways of paying for health care.

Chapters

Some chapters in Medical Conditions describe a single disorder or condition, such as delirium or falls. Others describe related disorders, such as mouth and dental disorders or heart valve disorders. In either case, the discussion usually begins with a brief definition, printed in red. The information that follows is typically organized under causes, symptoms, diagnosis, prevention, treatment, and outlook.

Additional Information

In some chapters, a more in-depth and sometimes more technical explanation of a topic is identified by a red bracket in the margin and the words “additional information.” Some readers will want to read this material to better understand a disorder; others may wish to skip it.

Cross-References

Throughout the book are cross-references that identify other important or related discussions of a subject. Cross-references are identified within the text by a numbered box. Corresponding numbered boxes are in the margin, along with the page number or numbers where more information can be found. Some cross-references guide the reader to an illustration, sidebar, or table elsewhere.

Medical Terms

Medical terms are often provided, usually in parentheses after the common term.

Diagnostic Tests

Diagnostic tests are mentioned throughout the book. In addition, chapter 5 explains several commonly used tests, including information about what a person is likely to experience when undergoing a test.

Illustrations, Sidebars, Tables

The many illustrations, sidebars, and tables help explain material in the text or give additional, related information.

Drug Information

Individual drugs are always referred to by their generic name, rather than by their brand or trade names. The first appendix contains two tables of drug names. The first table lists drugs mentioned in the book along with some of their corresponding trade names. The second table provides trade names with corresponding generic names.

Scattered throughout the book are many drug tables, identified by an Rx symbol. These drug tables provide additional information about a class or group of drugs.

Doses can be affected by age, sex, weight, height, the presence of more than one disorder, and the use of other drugs. Therefore, drug doses are not provided.

Essays

Twenty-five one-page essays, accompanied by photographs of their authors, are scattered throughout the book. The authors share their personal views and insights about aging and its effects on something they love. A few of the authors are famous; most are not.

Resources for Help and Information

The second appendix lists many organizations that can provide additional information about a disorder or help locate various support services. Information about how to contact these organizations is provided.