

Ageing – Quality with quantity

The Health Column

26 Oct
2016

Australians are living longer and the country has an ageing population. In 2014, 15% of the population (3.5 million people) were aged 65 and over, and by 2054 this is projected to increase to 21% (or 8.4 million people).

So what is 'old age'? Interestingly, younger and older Australians have been found to define 'old age' differently. While younger Australians feel that age is based on a number, older Australians feel that age is not just a number, but influenced by social, emotional and relational elements. Many people over the age of 65 years do not feel that the term 'old age' applies to them. They feel that the horizon of 'old age' shifts as they age.



Officially there are numerical ages when we are deemed to be a 'senior' or an older Australian. For example, Seniors Cards are provided to people aged 60 years of age or over, and not working more than a set number of hours per week in paid employment. From a health and medical point of view you are generally considered 'older' after the age of 65 years.

The National Seniors Australia organisation gives older Australians (both working and retired) a strong national voice. One of the objectives of the organisation is to promote the interests and welfare of those over 50 years of age in Australia and recognise the contribution of those over 50. Their website contains valuable information and fact sheets on a variety of topics, including health, work and careers, finance and retirement (see www.nationalseniors.com.au).

Living longer is a great thing, however increased lifespans and older age generally lead to increased ill health. Health conditions and impairments such as arthritis, dementia and hearing loss become more common as people get older.

The good news is that most older Australians consider themselves to be in good health. This assists people to enjoy a good quality of life for longer, and fully participate in the community. For example, older people may be involved in volunteering and informal care giving. While the majority of older Australians are not using aged care services at any one time, it can be expected that more assistance and care is needed for people 85 years of age and older compared to younger age groups. The need for assistance with cognitive and emotional tasks has been found to be four times greater for Australians aged 85 years and over compared to Australians aged 65-84 years (28% versus 7%).

Regardless of our age or physical condition, we benefit when we take control of our health. This includes making informed decisions based on the advice of doctors, pharmacists, nurses and other healthcare professionals.

Your local pharmacy is your health destination and can provide a range of products, medicines, services and advice to support you as you age. These include:

- mobility aids
- prescription medicine
- medicine management services (e.g. Dose Administration Aids) and other medication management initiatives (e.g. Home Medicines Review, MedsCheck & Diabetes MedsCheck)
- compression garments
- health and medicines advice
- blood pressure monitoring
- services to help you lose weight and quit smoking
- services to allow you to maintain your independence, such as home delivery.

Visit your local pharmacy today and find out what they have available.

There are also Self Care Fact Cards available on topics of special interest to us as we age. Some topics available include: *Osteoarthritis and Rheumatoid arthritis, High blood pressure, Osteoporosis, Prostate problems, Preventing falls, Carer support, Vision impairment and Sleeping problems*. Other Self Care Fact Cards and information sources may also be useful depending on individual circumstances – ask your pharmacist.

In addition, you can get more detailed information on using medicines wisely from the Self Care Fact Card titled *Wise use of medicines*. These Fact Cards are available from pharmacies around Australia providing the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's Self Care health information program.

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to www.psa.org.au/selfcare, then click 'Find a *Self Care pharmacy* near you'.