

# Biological aspects of ageing

Nicola Davies gained a broader understanding of the effects of ageing after reading a learning zone article

As a support worker for people with learning disabilities, most of my clients are older people confronted with the physiological effects of ageing. And as a researcher working with cancer patients, most of my clients are older people but sometimes the effects of ageing can be confused with the symptoms of cancer and the side effects of treatment (Gotay and Muraoka 1998).

I found it particularly interesting to learn about the various biological theories of ageing since my background is in psychology. I feel that I am now able to combine this knowledge with my background in psychology to gain a broader understanding of ageing and the effects it can have on daily activities. I will apply this wider understanding of ageing by sharing it with my colleagues.

Eating and drinking activities are a huge issue in the supported living environment, with food choices being fundamental to independent living and freedom of choice. However, some of the individuals I work with have difficulty chewing food because they have dentures or cannot swallow properly. This may severely restrict their choice of food and quality of life. I will make it my goal to ensure that all of my clients are aware of the different foods that are available for them to eat with ease and which they can enjoy individually or socially.

This is fundamental for maintaining adequate health and nutrition throughout the ageing process, especially since nutrient absorption can become depleted with age because of changes in gastrointestinal function (*Nutrition Today* 1992).

## Misdiagnosed

I support one man who is experiencing mild incontinence difficulties and has arthritis, and finds mobility difficult. I was shocked to read that urinary incontinence is sometimes misdiagnosed because nurses fail to respond to requests to go to the toilet. I intend to remain vigilant to some of the difficulties faced by him and other patients to ensure that I and other staff do not take away their dignity by neglecting some of the more personal needs that come with ageing.

Poor physical health has been identified as a contributing factor to the increase in mental health problems among older people,

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*This practice profile is based on NS351 Farley A et al (2006) The physiological effects of ageing on the activities of living, 20, 45, 46-52.*

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such as depression. This highlights a great need to support patients who are adjusting to the physiological and psychological effects of ageing **NS**

## References

**Gotay CC, Muraoka MY** (1998) Quality of life in long-term survivors of adult-onset cancers. *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*. 90, 9, 656-667.

**Nutrition Today** (1992) Nutrition of the elderly: conferences, symposia and reports. *Nutrition Today*. February issue. [www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0841/is\\_n1\\_v27/ai\\_11957008](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0841/is_n1_v27/ai_11957008) (Last accessed: November 3 2006)

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