

## Differentiating Between Normal Aging and Impairments

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When assessing older individuals, it is important to keep in mind the differences between normal and pathological changes that occur with aging. Late-life events such as chronic and debilitating medical disorders, loss of friends and loved ones, and the inability to take part in once-cherished activities can take a heavy toll on an aging person's emotional well-being. It can often be difficult to differentiate between symptoms that are a "normal" part of the aging process and those that may be impairments and require professional attention.

### The Differences Between Normal Aging and Dementia

During the process of typical aging, in most cases, independence in daily activities is preserved, whereas in dementia cases the person becomes critically dependent on others for key independent-living activities. Normal aging does impact the memory causing a decline in retaining details and increasing forgetfulness, whereas people with dementia may complain of memory problems only if specifically asked. They are unable to recall instances where memory loss was noticed. In response to memory loss associated to normal aging, the person is more concerned about forgetfulness than are close family members, whereas in the case of dementia close family members are much more concerned about incidents of memory loss than the individual. Individuals experiencing normal aging may experience occasional word-finding difficulties, will not get lost in familiar territory, are able to operate common appliances and can maintain prior level of interpersonal skills. For those experiencing dementia, they experience frequent word-finding pauses and substitutions, may get lost in familiar territory, become unable to operate common appliances, exhibits loss of interest in social activities and display socially inappropriate behaviors.

### Aging and Depression

It is a common misconception that depression is a normal part of aging. Although grief is a common occurrence throughout the lifespan, depression is a treatable condition. You or your loved one deserves to live a life free from depression and other mental health issues.

Older adults have typically had many events in their lives in which they have experienced a sense of grief. These individuals may also sense a loss of control over his or her life, physical health change and external pressures such as limited financial resources. These and other issues often give rise to negative emotions such as sadness, anxiety, loneliness and lowered self-esteem, which in turn may lead to depression.

Common symptoms that may occur in older adults suffering from depression are the following:

- Memory problems
- Confusion
- Social withdrawal
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Inability to sleep
- Irritability
- Delusions (fixed false beliefs)
- Vague complaints of pain
- Hopelessness, helplessness

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### **Individualized Care**

Aurora Behavioral Health System recognizes the unique needs of patients entering treatment during the later stages of life when it is common for an individual's conditions to be the result of, or to be further complicated by, physical challenges as a result of the aging process. In response to the need for acute care treatment aimed at addressing these unique needs, Aurora developed its Decades program specifically designed to provide an in depth diagnostic process, relying on the expertise of several geriatric mental health practitioners, to subsequently generate a comprehensive treatment plan. Each individualized treatment plan is strengths based and crafted to meet each patient's unique needs and produce a quick and long lasting change.

Aurora's Decades program serves adults 55+ seeking treatment for issues such as depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, disorientation, paranoia, behavioral issues and chemical dependency. We recognize the need for a holistic approach to treatment and, therefore, offer multiple avenues of engaging patients in the treatment process.

### **Help Is Only a Phone Call Away**

Aurora offers professional behavioral health services to assist you in working through this difficult time. Our services are designed to meet your specific needs at all different levels of care. Not only do we provide inpatient acute care services, but we also offer day treatment programs and outpatient therapy groups. Our Patient Services department provides 24/7 free, confidential assessments to help determine your needs and support you in making the appropriate program choice to help you begin your road to recovery.

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**Where healing starts and the road to recovery begins...**

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**24/7 Patient Services Helpline**  
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