

Myths and Realities of Aging

1. *The older population is growing and diversifying.*
Reality. The older population is very ethnically diverse and is growing. By 2030, 25% of the older population will be minorities.
2. *Many older people are sick or frail.*
Myth. Data indicates that at some time, 20% of those over sixty will be in nursing Homes, and only 5% of those people will become permanent residents. Only 25% of those 85 or older are institutionalized.
3. *Memory impairment is uncommon in older adults.*
Reality. Only 4.4% of persons 65 or older have memory impairments.
4. *Most seniors have some type of health problem.*
Myth. Seventy-two percent of seniors report that they are extremely healthy.
5. *Older people are lonely.*
Myth. People over 65 reported loneliness much less often than those under 25.
6. *It's harder to learn new tasks as you age.*
Myth and Reality. Some seniors require more time to learn new tasks; others do not. In most cases it depends on the type of task.
7. *Gender does not affect aging.*
Myth. Men and women age differently. Statistics indicate women live longer than men and have a higher incidence of osteoporosis. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to suffer from heart disease.
8. *Certain ethnic groups live longer and healthier.*
Myth. There is diversity within ethnic groups.
9. *The longer seniors live, the greater the chances are they will become severely depressed.*
Reality. As seniors live longer, there is a greater chance for clinical depression to develop.
10. *Seniors avoid new technologies.*
Myth. In 1998, over 25% of computers were purchased by older adults. In fact, seniors spend more time on the Internet than 12- to 17-year-olds.
11. *Older persons are less productive.*
Myth. Older workers have less absenteeism and are more satisfied with their jobs. Competence has more to do with attitude and commitment than age.
12. *Seniors learn new tasks more easily if they use the "hands-on" approach.*
Reality. Ninety percent of older adults state that they learn best by putting their hands on something and manipulating it.

13. *Over half of the senior population attends church or temple on a regular basis.*
Reality. Attending church, mosque, or temple is a good place for interaction for seniors.
14. *There is a growing tendency for senior women to stay in the work force longer than men.*
Reality. There are 10% more women working after the age of 59 than there were in 1959.
15. *Seniors like learning new tasks with their peers.*
Myth. For older adults the preferred learning format varies with the topic under study.
16. *Seniors generally rely on radio or television news programs as their source of learning.*
Myth. On the whole, 64% of older Americans almost always rely on newspapers, magazines, books, and journals when they want to learn.
17. *Older adults are set in their ways.*
Myth. Marketing surveys show that over 80% of older consumers are receptive to new products and services.
18. *Social Security payments contribute significantly to monthly earnings of all U.S. citizens.*
Myth. Social Security accounts for 82% percent of the income for those in the lowest fifth of the income distribution, but only for 20% of all others.
19. *The median net worth of older white households is significantly greater than that of older black households.*
Reality. In 1999, median net worth among older black households was estimated to be about \$13,000, compared with \$181,000 among older white households.
20. *The diets of seniors are better than those of the rest of the population.*
Reality. Twenty-one percent of the senior population was found to fulfill the dietary components of the Healthy Eating Index (a measure of the daily serving of fruit and milk products, and fat and sodium intake).
21. *Seniors are often victims of crime.*
Myth. Seniors are much less likely to be victims of crime (3 per 1000) than persons ages 12 to 64 (45 per 1000).
22. *Seniors enjoy dining out.*
Reality. Sixty-three percent of seniors go out to restaurants.
23. *It is more common for older women to live alone than older men.*
Reality. Fourteen percent of men 65 to 74 live alone, while 30% of women the same age live alone; 22% of men 75 and older live alone, while 54% of women live alone.
24. *Many older adults do volunteer work.*
Reality. About 16.3% of the senior population volunteers their services.

25. *Seniors are interested in the stock and bond market.*

Reality. With 401(K) plans and other pension plans many seniors are interested in ways to increase their net worth.

26. *The safest term to use when marketing to older adults is “senior.”*

Myth. The most successful promotions market to the people being targeted and are age neutral. Many older adults dislike the terms “elderly,” “senior citizen,” and “retired.” Keep in mind that a study conducted by the Marriott Corporation showed that most older people feel younger than their actual age by an average of 12 years.

27. *Playing bingo and cards are the number one and two recreational activities for seniors.*

Myth. While playing bingo and cards are popular with some seniors, they are by no means the number one and two recreational activities for seniors. Twenty-seven percent of seniors attend movies, sports events, clubs, and group events.

28. *Seniors’ main concern is Social Security and Medicare.*

Myth. Seniors’ main interest is family and friends. They are also interested in travel, sports, and current affairs.

29. *When you turn 65, you become a senior citizen.*

Myth. Old age begins with a decline in physical or mental ability, rather than with the arrival of a specific birthday.

Source: Carnaham, R. and Parker, S (2002). *Serving seniors: a resource manual for Missouri libraries*. MO: Missouri State Library.