


Module 3:  
Introduction to  
Healthy Aging



Ontg  
National Task Group  
on Intellectual Disabilities  
and Dementia Practices

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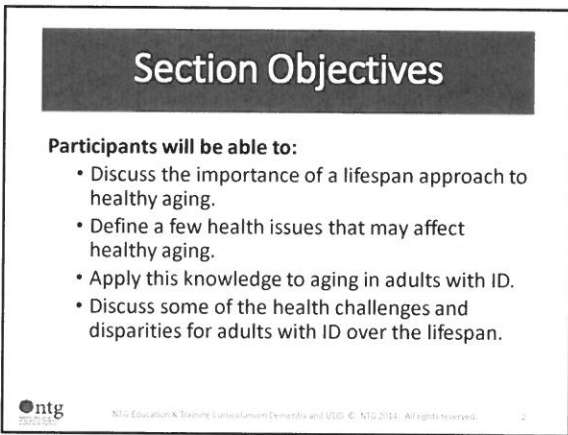
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### Section Objectives

**Participants will be able to:**

- Discuss the importance of a lifespan approach to healthy aging.
- Define a few health issues that may affect healthy aging.
- Apply this knowledge to aging in adults with ID.
- Discuss some of the health challenges and disparities for adults with ID over the lifespan.



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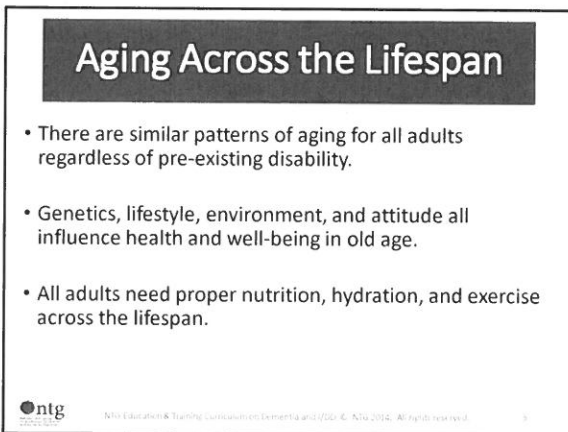
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### Aging Across the Lifespan

- There are similar patterns of aging for all adults regardless of pre-existing disability.
- Genetics, lifestyle, environment, and attitude all influence health and well-being in old age.
- All adults need proper nutrition, hydration, and exercise across the lifespan.



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### Lifespan Approach to Advocacy and Healthy Aging

- The Lifespan Approach to Advocacy and Healthy Aging connects all phases of life to the health and well-being of people with ID.
- The approach is based on the premise that what happens in childhood and young adulthood affects the quality of life in old age.
- To maintain health and wellbeing in later years, healthy practices across the lifespan can make a very positive difference.

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### Factors Impacting Healthy Aging

Healthy aging is impacted by the following factors:

- Poor lifespan health practices
- Long-term consequences of early-life therapeutic interventions
- Prolonged usage of medications adding to chronic conditions in older age (adverse drug reactions & polypharmacy)

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### Factors Impacting Healthy Aging (cont.)

Healthy aging is impacted by the following factors:

- Problems with accessing health services
  - Not having medical personnel familiar with I/DD
  - Not tracking risk conditions
- Age-associated pathologies
  - Dementia, cardiovascular disease, etc.
- Lack of exercise
- Poor nutrition and bad eating habits

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## Importance of Nutrition

- Nutrition is an important determinant of health and well-being throughout the lifespan.
- Nutrition is the “cornerstone of preventive medicine and handmaiden of curative medicine.”
- 10% or more weight loss may be indicative of serious disease or illness & should always be followed up.

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## Importance of Nutrition: The Power of Food

**Foods:**

- Nourish
- Comfort
- Meet cultural, emotional, social, & religious preferences.



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## Challenges to Healthy Aging in Adults with ID

- Lack of knowledge of medical history due to the following:
  - Staff turnover
  - Family not available for information, historical documentation unavailable
  - Health care provider turn over
  - Providers not understanding baseline functioning of the presenting older adult with ID

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### Challenges to Healthy Aging in Adults with ID

- Lack of systems for advocacy in agencies and families:
  - Information provided for the appointment may not include all pertinent information
  - Staff/family attending health care appointments may not be the most knowledgeable about the symptoms

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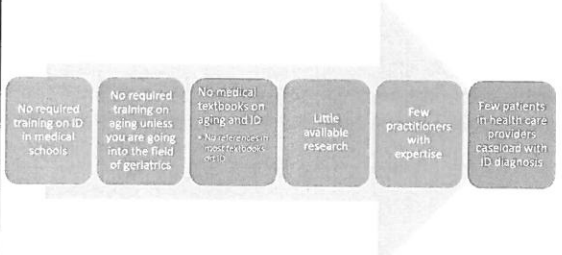
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### Health Care Disparities for Adults with ID



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### Risk of Diagnostic Overshadowing for Adults with ID

**Definition:** Blaming decline of abilities and changes in behavior on a pre-existing diagnosis.

- Example – Decline assumed to be a result of intellectual disability rather than disease process
- Example – Reported chest pain ignored because of the pre-existing diagnosis of ID

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### Body Systems and Differential Diagnosis

Body systems affected as we age.

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### Conditions and Diseases of Older Age to Rule Out

Cardiovascular Disease	Stroke
Vitamin & Mineral Deficiencies	Sensory Impairments

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### What Conditions Might Affect Behavior and Function?

- Nutritional/vitamin deficiency
- Head trauma
- Brain tumor
- Folic acid abnormalities

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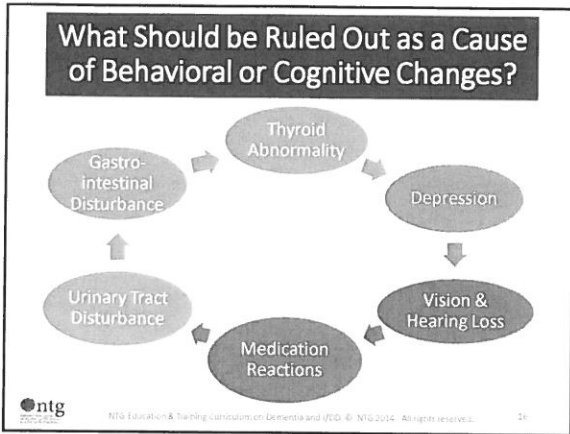
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### Behavioral Changes in Dementia

Some symptoms may present as behavioral problems rather than as health problems, including :

- Reduced sensory perception due to hearing or vision loss
- Memory impairment due to menopause
- Confusion due to interaction of multiple medications
- Delirium
- Depression

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### Physical Environment and Behavioral Changes

- Behavioral changes and decline in functioning always need to be considered within the context of the physical environment.
- Rule out problems with the physical environment as the cause of decline and behavioral change.

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### Examples of Behavioral Changes due to Physical Environment



- The individual sees a reflection in a window and thinks it is a prowler.
- A curtain blowing in the wind may look like someone is hiding behind it.
- The individual refuses to walk over a black rug because it looks like a huge hole in the floor.
- The individual urinates in corner of the bathroom because there is insufficient color contrast to recognize the toilet.



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### Some Disability Specific Risk Factors That May Affect Behavior

#### Autism

- Sensory overload
- Pain
- Anxiety/depression

#### Epilepsy

- Osteoporosis
- Arthritis
- Seizures

#### Cerebral Palsy

- Pain
- Arthritis, osteoporosis
- Urinary tract infections
- Upper and lower gastrointestinal difficulties
- Swallowing disorders
- Respiratory/pneumonia



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### Remember Albert?

In 2011 significant behavioral changes were observed including the following:

- Albert appeared unclean, unshaven, and refused to change clothes, when you used to care about his neat appearance.
- Albert reported seeing his aunts and mother even though they died many years ago.



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21

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## Remember Albert?

In 2011 significant behavioral changes were observed including the following:

- Albert refused to regularly ride the bus to and from day program, when he previously looked forward to going to day program.
- Not sleeping most nights, wandering around the residence and into peers rooms, sleeping at day program when he is not wandering through the halls of the day program.



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## Summary

- Lifetime health can affect the rate and way that people age.
- A number of factors can affect behavioral and functional decline.
- Some behavioral changes are determined by pre-existing conditions, some by health factors, and some by disease.
- It is important to look for the underlying cause of change before assuming automatically that the changes are due to dementia.



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## Take-Away Points

1. Maintaining health and wellness over the lifespan is essential for remaining healthy older age.
2. Watchfulness and high index of suspicion can help catch early-stage diseases and medical problems that affect cognitive and physical functioning.
3. Recognizing adverse behavior in persons with ID can help to identify medical problems.



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