

# Aging

Aging impacts all of us—this includes our own personal aging experiences along with those of our family and friends. Because of advances in healthcare, many people are living longer and longer. In fact, it is estimated that well over 30% of U.S. children in preschool right now will live to 100!

## Positive Aging Versus Ageism

Negative (and sometimes extremely overpositive) stereotypes and biases about aging individuals (“ageism”) are pervasive in society. Ageism often goes unrecognized yet influences expectations (what we expect for ourselves and what others expect for us) and opportunities. Despite the misconceptions and societal pressures that exist, living into one’s 70s, 80s, and beyond provides important benefits. Older adults have much to contribute to their family, friends, and communities, and are more likely to be involved in volunteer activities than those who are younger. As we age, we are likely to have survived stressful life events and learned how to draw upon our personal strengths and values. Compared to those who are younger, therefore, aging individuals have stronger positive coping responses during very challenging circumstances. When new difficulties arise, it can be helpful to remember the strategies that were used to successfully cope in the past.

## Differences Among Older Adults

As we grow older and accumulate experiences across a lifetime, we become more different from each other in our interests, attitudes, and abilities. Our specific chronological age (e.g., 65, 79, 94) provides less information than the details of our health and how we are managing daily life. Because of disparities in healthcare access, some people in their 50s may have more chronic illnesses and disabilities than others in their 70s and 80s. We are never just the sum of our age; we are also different in many other ways that all interrelate with each other (such as race and ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, veteran status, rural vs. urban living). Assessment and attention to the details of each person are thus very important features of mental health care for aging individuals.

## Mental Health Concerns

Most older adults are less likely than younger adults to have common mental health conditions (such as clinical depression, PTSD, and substance use disorders). There are, however, some life circumstances that are especially challenging for aging individuals and that may lead to behavioral health care.

## What Is Cognitive Behavior Therapy?

Behavior Therapy and Cognitive Behavior Therapy are types of treatment that are based firmly on research findings. These approaches aid people in achieving specific changes or goals. Changes or goals might involve:

- A way of acting:** controlling salt or alcohol intake, taking medications as prescribed;
- A way of feeling:** helping a person manage stress;
- A way of thinking:** understanding that diet and exercise affect blood pressure;
- A way of dealing with physical or medical problems:** using behavioral techniques to control diet;
- A way of coping:** learning to take an active role in one’s own health

Behavior Therapists and Cognitive Behavior Therapists usually focus more on the current situation and its solution,

## Research-supported CBT can help with (among other concerns):

- Physical health problems that have impacted quality of life
- Chronic Pain
- Sleep Concerns
- Family Caregiving Stressors (for a spouse, parent, disabled adult child, grandchildren)
- Brain Health Concerns (desire to promote brain health; recognizing and responding to normative age-appropriate cognitive changes; brain health problems that indicate a neurocognitive/brain disease, such as Alzheimer's Disease)
- Recurring Anxiety and/or Depression triggered by new life stressors

## Opportunities to Grow

The good news is that older adults benefit from mental health interventions as much as younger adults do! Whether the plan is for individual psychotherapy or a series of brief sessions as a part of primary-care treatment, CBT interventions can lead to skills that improve quality of daily life. There are specific things that aging individuals can and should expect when receiving mental-health care. Providers should demonstrate an understanding of best practices in working with older adults. This is evident in a variety of ways (e.g., age-appropriate assessment measures, written materials that are in an accessible font type and size, among others).

- *For a list of treatment providers in your area, check out ABCT's Find-A-Therapist: <http://www.findcbt.org/FAT/>; to refine the search, you can try "Aging" as a specialty or "Adults 65+" in populations.*

## RESOURCES

### ■ American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)

AARP provides information and resources on many issues, including long-term care, financial and legal concerns  
1 – 888 – 687 – 2277; [aarp.org](http://aarp.org)

### ■ Eldercare Helpline/Area Agencies on Aging

State and local area agencies on aging (AAAs) help older adults remain at home and in the community 1 – 800 – 677 – 1116;  
[eldercare.acl.gov](http://eldercare.acl.gov)

### ■ Friendship Line: Institute on Aging

Friendly telephone visits available anytime  
1 - 800 - 971 – 0016; [ioaging.org/services/all-inclusive-health-care/friendship-line](http://ioaging.org/services/all-inclusive-health-care/friendship-line)

### ■ Well Connected Groups for positive activities via telephone and internet

1- 877 - 797 – 7299 [covia.org/services/well-connected](http://covia.org/services/well-connected)

rather than the past. They concentrate on a person's views and beliefs about their life, not on personality traits. Behavior Therapists and Cognitive Behavior Therapists treat individuals, parents, children, couples, and families. Replacing ways of living that do not work well with ways of living that work, and giving people more control over their lives, are common goals of behavior and cognitive behavior therapy.

## How to Get Help

It is wise to check on the credentials of a psychotherapist. Most will hold advanced academic degrees. They should be listed as members of professional organizations, such as the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies or the American Psychological Association. They should be licensed to practice in your state. You can find competent specialists who are affiliated with local universities or mental health facilities or who are listed on the websites of professional organizations. You may, of course, visit our website ([www.abct.org](http://www.abct.org)) and click on "Find a CBT Therapist."