

Common Diseases with Aging

As a person ages, the immune system weakens, organs begin to deteriorate and the body becomes susceptible to a variety of diseases. If the person you care for is experiencing any unusual symptoms, it is usually wise to encourage him or her to discuss these symptoms with a doctor. It may turn out to be nothing, but then again, they may be signaling the early stages of a disease that—if treated early—can be cured.

To ensure the best treatment, it is vital that you keep track of any symptoms your patient or loved one is experiencing—write down their intensity, frequency, and duration, if necessary. You can then refer to this log when you meet with the doctor. Please note this list is not comprehensive and includes only the most common illnesses and symptoms.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Description: Brain damage and the death of brain cells that affect brain function and cognitive ability.

Symptoms: Begins with minor memory loss and confusion and progresses to more severe cognitive and physical impairment.

Treatment: No cure, but it can be treated with a combination of drugs and other therapies.

ARTHRITIS

Description: Refers to a variety of inflammatory joint disorders—including osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and gout.

Symptoms: Pain, swelling of the joints and difficulty moving.

Treatment: Pain relievers, anti-inflammatory drugs, heat, physiotherapy and surgery.

CANCER

Description: Mutated body cells multiply out of control, destroying healthy organs and tissue. It can strike any part of the body, and without treatment most cancer is fatal. Commonly affects the bladder, bones, brain, breasts, cervix, colon, blood (Leukemia), lungs, prostate gland, skin, stomach, testicles or uterus.

Symptoms: Typically, no symptoms in the early stages. Warning signals may include changes in bowel or bladder habits, sores not healing, unusual bleeding or discharge, lump in the breast or elsewhere, persistent indigestion, problems swallowing, changes in warts or moles or nagging cough.

Treatment: Surgery, radiation therapy/radiotherapy and/or chemotherapy.

DIABETES

Description: With Diabetes Mellitus, or sugar diabetes, the body cannot properly use sugars and starches—either because of a lack of insulin (Type 1) or the body's inability to use insulin properly (Type 2). Type 1 generally manifests itself early in life, in people under 25; Type 2 generally affects people over 40.

Symptoms: Frequency of urination and persistent thirst. Type 1 diabetes may also be accompanied by increased appetite and general weakness.

Treatment: Type I: daily insulin shots.
Type II: diet, oral antidiabetic drugs or insulin.

HEART ATTACK

Description: Occurs when a part of heart muscle loses its blood supply, generally as a result of coronary arterosclerosis.

Symptoms: pressure, squeezing or pain in the chest; pain spreading to shoulders, neck or arms; lightheadedness, fainting, nausea, sweating or shortness of breath.

Treatment: prompt medical attention.

HEART DISEASE

Description: Refers to a variety of disorders, including pericarditis (inflammation of the pericardium), myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle), cardiomyopathy (degeneration of the heart muscle), arterosclerosis (fatty deposit build-up in the arteries), and hypertension (high blood pressure).

Symptoms: The symptoms of heart disease are very different between women and men. See chart below.¹

Treatment: Drugs, surgery and diet.

OSTEOPOROSIS

Description: Calcium salts are depleted and bone fabric deteriorates.

Symptoms: Sometimes asymptomatic, but symptoms may include loss of height, backache, bones fracturing more easily and severe pain.

Treatment: Calcium supplements, vitamin D, hormones can help prevent and slow the disease.

PARKINSON'S DISEASE

Description: A disorder of the nervous system.

Symptoms: Tremors, slow movements, speech impairment, dementia and difficulty walking.

Treatment: Drugs can help control symptoms.

PNEUMONIA

Description: An inflammation of the lungs caused by a bacterial, viral or fungal infection.

Symptoms: *Bacterial:* cold symptoms, shivers, bloody sputum, high fever, chest pain, vomiting and diarrhea. *Viral or fungal:* cough, bloody sputum, headache, muscle aches and blue-tinged lips.

Treatment: Antibiotics for bacterial and fungal. Also breathing exercises, steam inhalations, oxygen therapy and painkillers.

STROKE

Description: A blood vessel leading to the brain gets clogged or bursts, thus denying part of the brain blood flow and oxygen and eventually killing the cells in that part of the brain.

Symptoms: Numbness, weakness, confusion, cognitive or speech impairment, severe headache, dizziness and vision problems.

Treatment: Rehabilitation is possible, but the effectiveness of this treatment depends on the severity of the stroke.

Symptoms of Heart Disease

...in Women

Agnina (or chest pain). Women often describe this as a tightness in the chest, sometimes radiating down the left arm or into the jaw. This is often mistaken for indigestion.

Breathlessness (chronic) or waking up at night having difficulty catching one's breath. Chronic fatigue—fatigue associated with heart disease is usually overwhelming and unusual.

Dizziness—unexplained lightheadedness, even blackouts.

Edema—swelling, particularly of the ankles and/or lower legs.

Fluttering (or rapid) heartbeats.

Gastric upset (or nausea).

...in Men

Sudden pressure, fullness, squeezing or pain in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes or goes away and then comes back.

Pain that radiates from the center of the chest to the shoulders, neck or arms.

Chest discomfort with lightheadedness, fainting, sweating, nausea or shortness of breath.

Sudden onset of rapid heartbeats.

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