

LESSON 12

ADULTHOOD AND AGING

SUMMARY

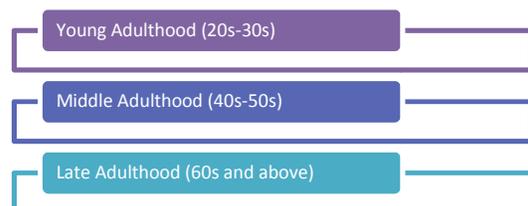
The kinds of images which normally come to our mind when we hear the word 'adult and aging' are responsibility, stability, forgetfulness and sometimes poor health and dependence on others. Becoming adult and growing old is a biological process, but many other developments also take place along with it.

The Adulthood Stage

The period of adulthood is marked by society's expectations of performing one's duty as an adult. Some special roles and relationships like family and career are the major milestones of adulthood.

Our capabilities and behaviours continue to change as we grow older because of the biological growth, knowledge and the way we interact with environment.

In the Indian tradition the period of adulthood refers to **Grihastha Ashram**. During this stage an individual enters the social life and accepts responsibilities of family, marriage and career. This stage has the following sub periods:



Young Adulthood – Individuals see themselves as autonomous, independent, and financially less dependent on parental family. Individual becomes concerned with career choice, starting a family, forming relationships with professional peers and community members. Unemployment and marital discord are two common crises in this stage. According to Erikson this period is characterized by a crisis of '**intimacy versus isolation**'.

Very often, during the early thirty's individuals make a reappraisal of their choices and seek to make specific changes in their career choice and social relations. These experiences are described as "**age thirty transition**".

Adulthood or Middle Stage

Individual arrives at middle age in the forties and fifties. It is characterized by competence, maturity, responsibility and stability. This is the time when one wants to enjoy the success of job, satisfaction derived from the family and social life. People are more focused on health, the future of children, aging parents, the use of leisure time and plans for old age.

For women, menopause occurs between the age of forty-five and fifty. Menopause is supposed to be accompanied by some distressing

physical and psychological symptoms in women, whereas men show greater concern towards health, strength, power and sexual potency.

It is viewed as period of creativity and significant contribution to society. Erikson characterizes middle adulthood as a phase of crisis involving generativity versus self-absorption.

The middle age transition is also a period of turbulence. People start viewing themselves as older and become conscious of their mortality which often leads to emotional instability. For people in regular jobs, the end of the middle adulthood years involves coming to terms with possible retirement from work life and the associated readjustments in life.

Old Age - Later adulthood or the period of old age begins around the age of sixty. During this stage most individuals lose their jobs as they retire from active service. They begin to fear about their physical and psychological health. Many of the elderly people lose their spouses and suffer from emotional insecurity.

In our society, the elderly is typically perceived as inactive, deteriorating intellectually, narrow-minded, attaching significance to religion and spirituality only. However, this may not be true of everybody. Many people at the age of sixty or above remain very healthy and

active in life. The life style including exercise, diet, and regular health check-up helps people enjoy a meaningful and active life during old age. In fact, the older persons have vast reservoir of knowledge, experience and wisdom on which the community can draw upon.

Physical and cognitive changes during adulthood and old age

With advancing age certain inevitable and universal changes such as chemical changes in cells or gradual loss of adaptive reserve capacity take place. There are also certain cognitive changes taking place from middle adulthood onwards.

Physical Changes - It has been found that the body organs of most persons show a 0.8 to 1 percent decline per year in the functional ability after the age of 30 years. The major physical changes associated with aging are described as external changes, internal changes and changes in the sensory capacities and cognitive abilities.

External Changes: This refers to the symptoms of growing old that can be seen in an individual. With many individuals the symptoms of aging can be seen as greying hair, aging skin shift in posture and appearance of wrinkles and other changes.

Internal Changes: These changes refer to the symptoms of growing old that are not visible. These include changes in the respiratory system, gastrointestinal system, cardiovascular system, and central nervous system.

Changes in Sensory Capacities: With advancing age, there is gradual slow-down in the sensory abilities. As you know we communicate with the outer world through our senses. Losing in any of the senses can have profound psychological and social consequences.

Cognitive Changes: Cognition refers to the process by which information is acquired, stored, and used. During adulthood and aging various aspects of cognition like memory, learning, attention and speed of performance get adversely affected. The aged people often report forgetfulness, difficulty in learning new techniques and acquiring skills. The concentration and responsiveness to environmental stimuli decreases in old age. Dementia and Alzheimer's are diseases are some of the frequently occurring diseases of the old age. In general people become more vulnerable during old age.

Aging and social support - Enlarging social network is another means of coping with life problems. Building a social network of people of their own age group in neighbourhood or

elsewhere provides them with greater opportunity to share their life circumstances and find emotional expressions for their existing problems. Through such social networks, one can get an unconditional expression of approval, share secrets, provide new experiences to each other, and develop trusting relationships.

Involvement in grand parenting helps elderly satisfy many of their personal and emotional needs.

Coping with the problems during old age

Some of the effective coping strategies are as follows:

Coping Strategies for old age

Develop an attitude of flexibility so that one may adapt to the pressures and problems of old age.

Recognize that one has to explore new ways of coping with life events.

Greater use of information seeking and problem-solving strategies rather than withdrawing or isolating.

Increasing self-confidence, self-reliance, developing healthy attitudes about one's strengths and weaknesses.

Learning and maintaining effective coping skills and adopting an active approach towards the environment.

Importance of Old age people in the society

One of the reasons for the growth of the Indian society is its multigenerational structure which means staying of many generations together in one family. This phenomenon is expressed in the form of joint family system. Aged

people have been always considered as individuals with a vast repertoire of knowledge and experience. Staying with them and respecting them helps not only in personal growth but facilitates multidimensional growth of a person.

Today many of the problems seen in the society are due to breakdown in the family system. Young couples prefer to stay alone to seek independence and doing away with the restrictions. But the repercussion of this system is largely being felt on the younger generation.

With the emerging nuclear family system, the younger generation is becoming deprived of the rich cultural transmission. It has been found that emotional expressions and values in young generation have also been affected by the absence of elders in the family.

Evaluate yourself

1. Discuss any four styles of coping in making healthy adjustment in old age.
2. Describe the different stages of adulthood and explain the physical and cognitive changes.
3. How can old age people contribute to society?