

Today's Elderly change what it means to be Old

By Kate McCarthy

The look and feel of what it is to be elderly is changing. Today's elderly, commonly referred to as the Baby Boomer Generation, is a highly educated, analytical and connected consumer who is interested in enriching and enjoying their lives. Their values and perceptions of who they are and how they participate in society differ greatly from previous generations. This means this generation has different expectations and needs than generations gone by.

When dealing with seniors and the elderly, it is easy to fall back on stereotypes about the aging. Yet today's elderly are progressively changing what it means to be old. They value independence, social

connections, altruism, personal growth and experiences. This means older perceptions of who the elderly are and what they want will no longer apply. Today's elderly will not be content with stereotypical bingo games or shuffle board at the nursing home as their parents might have been. They will expect to remain at home and actively participate in their lives and community.

Perceptions of aging have changed. A look through this breakdown of how the elderly traditionally viewed themselves in the past and how the elderly of today perceive themselves will show how conventional perceptions of the elderly are seriously out of date.



Sophisticated expectations in lifestyle and longevity in lifespan mark a new look and feel to growing old.

Traditional Elderly

- Identify all older people to be about the same in outlook
- See age as a physical state
- Perceive themselves at or near their chronological age
- Tend to feel, think, and do things they feel match their chronological age
- Feel that one should act one's age
- Feel life should be dependable and routine
- Have less sense of being in control of their own lives
- Low to average capabilities as consumers, possess less self-confidence about making consumer decisions.
- Some concern that they will make a mistake when buying something
- They are not innovative
- Seek stability and a secure routine
- Normal interest in gather possessions
- Lower measured life satisfaction with some regrets over how they have lived their lives.
- Perceive themselves to be of normal health for their age

Today's Elderly

- Believe themselves to be different in outlook than others the same age
- See age as a state of mind
- Perceive themselves as younger than their chronological age
- Feel younger, think younger, and behave in a more youthful manner
- Have a youthful outlook on life
- Feel there is considerable adventure in life and is willing to pursue it
- Have greater sense of being in control of their own lives
- Especially knowledgeable and alert consumers, possess greater self-confidence about making consumer decisions.
- Less concern that they will make a mistake when buying something
- Innovative about selective issues
- Seek new experiences & personal challenges
- Less interested in accumulating possessions
- Higher measured life satisfaction with less regret over how they have lived their lives.
- Perceive themselves to be healthier than more people their age

- Feel less secure financially

- Feel more financially secure

Understanding who the Elderly of today are and how they perceive themselves is an important step to providing care for them as they age. Physical care needs for the aging will generally remain the same but attitudes and approaches to providing that care will need to be adjusted to accommodate today's elderly.

Sources:

"Journal of Services Marketing" by Anil Mathur, Elaine Sherman, and Leon G. Schiffman. Retrieved from www.emeraldinsight.com/journals.htm on 4/13/14.



Kate McCarthy is Director of Operations for HomeAid Health Care which provides services for the elderly who wish to remain safe and independent at home. HomeAid is sister company to Prairie Home Assisted Living which has served the physical, spiritual, mental and health needs of their Residents since 1999. Together the two family owned companies provide comprehensive care for the elderly in the Fox Valley of Wisconsin.

