



Facts on Aging Series #2

Celebrate Elderhood is a Kalamazoo County initiative that brings attention to the issues of aging, challenging myths and misconceptions so elders can reach their full potential no matter what their circumstances are, benefiting themselves, their families and communities. In this column we will continue to explore the myths and realities of aging.

Myth #3 – Most older people are in poor health. FALSE

The myth of being old means being sick is simply not true for the majority of adults 65+ who rate their health positively. In fact, more than two-thirds of people over 65 told researchers that they are in good, very good or excellent health and more than half over 85 said that too. Older people make mental adjustments in their reference point of judging their own health and will typically see themselves as more healthy than they originally expected for their age, or compared to others their age.

However, older people are much more likely than younger people to suffer from chronic conditions (lasting 3 months or more), such as arthritis, diabetes, osteoporosis, high blood pressure, heart disease, and cancer. Most of us will have some type of chronic condition as we age, and many of us will have at least two. The good news is that there are proven programs that can help us live better with these chronic conditions, such as the Stanford Personal Action Toward Health programs and Matter of Balance Falls Prevention Program offered through the Area Agency on Aging IIIA in coordination with community partners and Enhance Fitness and Arthritis Programs offered by the Portage Senior Center, Senior Services Southwest Michigan, and YMCA.

What's important is how we as older adults cope with the aging process and how our community responds. Staying active and engaged in our communities, whether that is volunteering with non-profit and faith based organizations, schools, having a part-time job, helping out our relatives and neighbors will pay dividends as we age. For those elders who due to more debilitating conditions cannot get out much, as a community we need to make sure they can stay at home with the supportive services needed and also determine how to keep them engaged with purpose in their lives.

For more information on the programs mentioned above or options for transportation to jobs or volunteer sites contact the Area Agency on Aging's Information & Assistance Service at 269-373-5173 or search the website at www.kalcounty.com/aaa.

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