

Hi Blog Friends

This is a short blog on ageing and its effects and some comments on how to deal with it. The topic of ageing has gained some publicity lately with the upcoming 2024 Presidential election in the US. Also, we need to keep in mind that the ageing population is growing fast especially in the west where birthrates have reduced. So, the population of older individuals actually becomes more political and social influential.

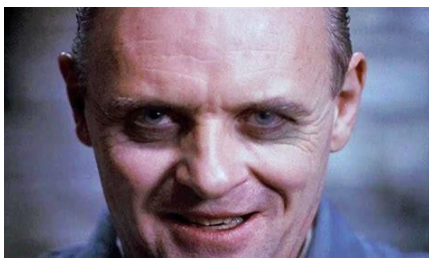
Just some examples here.



President Joe Biden and past president Donald Trump have exhibited behaviour in their speeches and debates (Biden especially in the debate with Trump) that has drawn attention to their age. This ranges from losing one's train of thought, confusing people and names, making comments in speeches that are rather strange and somewhat irrelevant.



Trump, for example, has referred to the fictional serial killer Dr. Hannibal Lector (a fictional character created by Brian Harris based probably on a real person featured in many films and books such as Brian Cox; 'Manhunter', Anthony Hopkins; 'The Silence of the Lambs', Hannibal; 'Red Dragon', Gaspard Ulliel; 'Hannibal Rising', and more). The character is well known, though Trump mentions him many times for reasons that are not apparent or relevant to what he was saying.



Anthony Hopkins as Hannibal Lector in 'Silence of the Lambs'.

Trump also makes strange comments that appear to be unrelated to what he was saying. Both Biden and Trump also showing signs of losing some balance, especially Trump, who it is said does not like stairs or ramps.

The question is, are these signs of ageing? And, also if they are, does this limit their capacities to serve as US Presidents? Let's get into this!

I will approach this topic under two major points:

1. The false attribution of, and myths relating to, certain behaviours as ageing.
2. A sceptical approach to the reality of ageing based on evidence. For older folks like me, how do we compensate for the reality of ageing that we experience. There are ways, don't give into myths!

First major point. False attributions and myths.

I will deal with the phenomenon of ageing firstly, as it is one of the most common forms of discrimination in many communities. Ageism can impact on all age groups, though the term was used first by Robert Butler to describe discrimination (such as in racism and sexism) against the elderly. Ageism is defined as:

"A bias against individuals and groups based on their age, which may take the form of discrimination at all levels against such individuals and groups, up to and including victimisation and bullying."

In Australia, where I live, the Human Rights commission headed by Dr Kay Patterson in 2021 had this to say about ageism. I assume the same may apply to most western economies.

"Most Australians (90%) agree ageism exists in Australia, with 83% agreeing ageism is a problem and 65% saying it affects people of all ages."

These findings were included in the Commission's report, 'What's age got to do with it?' A snapshot of ageism across the Australian lifespan.

The report found ageism remains the most accepted form of prejudice in Australia, with 63% having experienced ageism in the last five years.

Dr Patterson points out that 'Ageism' is arguably the least understood form of discriminatory prejudice, with evidence suggesting it is more pervasive and socially accepted than sexism or racism.

I want to make the following comments relating to short false assumptions about ageism.

1. Older people lose aspects of cognition and behaviour.

This is true for some individuals, but not for everyone. Some very elderly people can function more effectively in their 80s and even 90s than many who are 20 years younger. So ageing is not simply related to one's biological age.

However, the assumption that age impacts on all older individuals can be quite serious:

1. Employment is impacted by the false assumption that ageing impacts negatively on your work. I have some personal experience on this. I taught at a university for many years and was not really interested in retiring, so I worked into my late 70s.

Then it happened, I was doing my job as good as before (no complaints about my teaching), my work was assessed every year like it is for all lectures and no issues were found that needed any attention. But the Faculty I worked at, for reasons unknown to me, refused to renew my contract. To their credit, the union assisted me to fight this. I got a sort of deal to work another year if I went quietly. So, I did.

My conclusion about this was it was just straight ageism and, in a faculty that prided itself on its gerontological studies. I have since heard this is a common experience from older workers. I accept there are some jobs that are impacted on with age, especially work that requires physical effort. Though, many jobs are not impacted like this.

2. older adults are also more likely to be:

a. Treated by healthcare professionals as not warranting certain treatments, as they conclude the treatment will prove too difficult or expensive for someone whose health is already in decline. This is no excuse for lack of treatment.

b. Many individuals portray older adults as Basically unhealthy. They assume that chronic pain, depression, or cognitive decline happen as a natural consequence of ageing. This is not true.

c. The elderly are not regarded as sexual beings anymore. Ageing does result in physical changes that may, (in the west we live in a society that promotes youth and beauty), be seen as unattractive and undesirable sexually. Sexuality is seen as out of the question for many, and those that can, spend money on making themselves look younger by surgery, makeup, clothes and you name it.

d. Nursing homes for older people don't even consider that the sexual desire is there anymore, so no allowance is made for romantic connections. This is especially the case for LBTQI individuals. However, to the contrary of that, many older people consider their sex life improved, so age need not be a barrier to sexual expression.

Second Major point;

How to deal with ageing as a sceptic. What is the reality of ageing? The impact of ageing on lifestyle and how to deal with it.

I'm going to present firm scientific evidence for the impact of ageing the positive effects of ageing and the reality of an ageing body. And also, what action we can take to deal with such ageing impacts. Also, I encourage all older people to act in political or just social interaction with others to reject the stereotypes of ageing and to fight for services that enable access to any service. I will deal with this under a few headings.

Loss of Proprioception and muscle tone

Proprioception is a **big** word, but it simply means the interaction of our body in space, or if you like, the body's interaction in the physical environment.

Proprioceptors, as they are called, are in tendons, muscles, ligaments and joint capsules. They send messages to the brain via the central nervous system. They are basically important for balance and posture. Furthermore, they are important for planning action and dealing with unexpected aspects of the physical environment. Also, with ageing we lose muscle function as the muscles atrophy to a certain extent. There are exercises that can assist here. However nevertheless as we age the loss of proprioception and muscle function does tend, as research shows, to reduce balance and posture that as we age, we tend to lose this capacity at various rates. The major impact of ageing is balance that increases the likelihood of falls.

The Australian Government Institute of Health and Welfare says falls account for 77% of injury hospitalisations among those aged 65 and over and outnumber all other injury causes combined by a ratio of 3:1.

So there you are, older folks. You must deal with this and prevent yourself going head over turkey. These are some suggestions:

Don't use stairs, especially stairs that have no handrail. I personally avoid stairs and even if there are no alternatives such as lifts and elevators, I know there are programs around that assist us to build up muscle function to assist in using stairs.

However, while exercises are good for building muscles that have weakened by ageing, I nevertheless avoid using stairs unless it's necessary.

I have experienced overseas in some countries that even quite expensive hotels have stairs without any handrail at all. Furthermore, I once booked into such a hotel thinking it would have lifts as it was more than two stories. There was no lift, so I said sorry I'm booking out, I'm not going to use those stairs. They said they would help me - no way, I said, so out I went to find a ground floor room or a hotel with lifts. Even ramps with handrails can be dangerous. Ramps must be legally from 1:8 to 1:10 and have handrails

Unsafe stairs



b. If you find yourself losing balance even to a minor extent don't take risks. Don't hesitate to use a walking stick as it does assist with balance. Personally, I have a mobility scooter and its wonderful it can get me anywhere I want without the anxiety of falling. And. Its also fun to use.

c. If you want and if you drive why not ask your doctor to recommend a disability parking permit? They are quite helpful in saving walking after parking. Also, we need to get governments to create more parking for those who have a walking disability. I have again personally talked to management of certain venues that have too few or even no disability parking. I let them know if it's illegal and also say they are missing valuable sales as many individuals will not use a venue without parking facilities for disability. Surprisingly I have had quite allot of success in this and changes have been made. So don't hesitate to have you say on this.

b. Cognitive lose

The brain controls many aspects of thinking, such as making decisions, planning activities, memory and other cognitive activities. All these impact on hw we live our everyday lives and if we are able to live independently.

As we get older there are changes in these functions some quite challenging, some just annoying and, believe it or not, some cognitive functions improve. The negative effects are losing one's train of thought, some decreases in paying attention to what is going on around us.

Aging may also bring positive cognitive changes. For example, many studies have shown that older adults have larger vocabularies and greater knowledge of the depth of meaning of words than younger adults. Older adults may also have learned from their many years of accumulated knowledge and experiences. Whether and how older adults apply this knowledge, and how the brain changes as a result, is an area that researchers are actively exploring.

On the positive side older adults can still acquire new skills, Despite the changes in cognition that may come with age, older adults can still do many of the things they have enjoyed their whole lives. Research shows that older adults can still learn new skills both mental and physical.

Dealing with cognitive loss

Cognitive loss such as in memory, losing one's train of thought, attention deficit, occur at varying rates and severity. It is possible for some to experience some cognitive lass in their late 50'' while others, even in their 90's, show little cognitive loss.

There are a few reasons why cognitive loss may not be due only to ageing. These include drugs such as hallucinogenic, stimulants and relaxants. Overuse and even use of alcohol, LSD, cannabis, opioids, and cocaine-based stimulants are some. Even prescribed medications can impact on cognitive function. These include sedatives, tranquilizers, and anticholinergic medications all tend to interfere with

brain function. Many can affect also muscle function as well as learning and memory in the brain. Some illnesses and diseases can also impact on brain function and cognition.

However, don't despair there are ways of dealing and improving cognitive decline. These are some that have been identified, playing musical instruments.

Reading and writing (fiction or non-fiction), playing card games and board games, going out to museums and other educational events,

If you have some memory loss such as remembering names such as those of people you know and others you meet and other items of everyday life can be very frustrating. However, I have some suggestions, the main one bring 'word association'.

Word Association

(sometimes referred to as Mnemonic techniques)

This involves using a word you are familiar with the one you want to remember. I have had some experience with this and find it very useful It has a long history with it being mentioned by philosophers back to ancient times Freud used it as a sort of



therapeutic technique. Karl Jung the famous Swiss psychologist (Psychoanalyst), probably influenced by Freud, developed a famous Jung's Word Association technique that he introduced with much acclaim to US audiences.

Ancient people often tied strings around their wrists to assist them to remember something.

However, word association can be a powerful technique for improving memory even in the elderly where cognitive function is declining. I have used word association techniques since I was a young guy at university. I can only briefly deal with the basics here though there are numerous web sites you can access for more detail.

This is one:

<https://www.memory-improvement-tips.com/memory-association.html>

The Basics

Word association as mentioned above is the substitution of a familiar word for the one you wish to remember. This may involve a mental image as well. The best way for me to explain this is to provide some personal examples.

1 Just a simple word association I used recently. I recently met a person who gave me his address. I had no way or writing this down at the time nor did he. He lives in a street named Bentley street. This was simple to associate as another friend of mine has Bentley as a second name. For some reason I have always remembered my friends full name with Bentley as his second name. The number in Bentley street is 34 so, 34 Bentley Street. 34 is the age of a young friend of mine. I thus have two

friends with a name and a number associated with the address of my new friend. This sounds complex but I can assure you I never forget this address.

2. Sometimes you can use an image to even remember complex names. I am a keen gardener and collect many rare plants and it is important to me to remember the Latin name of the plant I have. As I get older I am more frequently forgetting the Latin names so here are a few examples' .

I have several rare plants that are in what is referred to as the euphorbia family. I just keep forgetting the name euphorbia so here is what the connection is using an image.

The image is someone laughing



To me laughing means happiness **euphoria** so this gives me euphorbia. You may think this is complex, but I no longer forget **Euphorbia** as I was doing, before I used this word/image technique.

Another plant family I kept forgetting was Heliconia. So here is the connection I made

Image of a helicopter



So! Helicopter leads me to Heliconia. I now don't ever forget the Latin term **Heliconia**.

You can also invent a word association using acronyms. An acronym is the use of first letters of each word in a series of words and becomes a word itself. Such as NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) or NASA (Aeronautics and Space Administration). I often use an acronym as an aid to remember. The other day I used an acronym for remembering to get items I kept forgetting, even when I wrote them down. I needed to remember to get batteries and shampoo. So I made an acronym **B** Batteries, **A** and, **S** Shampoo. I just remembered **BASE**. The **E** meant nothing, but it made a word I remembered.

We do not know precisely why word association works except it is based on one's

personal associations. Readers may like to read Jungs word association approach to get more detail on this.

I hope this rather technical blog is helpful as it has works for me for many years even into the present when I am experiencing age related memory loss.