

Wall Street Journal dispels aging myths

[Tom Carney](#) / North Shore News

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All I want for Christmas is a little good news on the seniors file.

Santa came early this year. In a piece titled, *Why Everything You Think About Aging May Be Wrong*, The Wall Street Journal's Anne Tergesen shows that in many ways life gets better as we get older. Tergesen does a great job of dispelling some popular stereotypes and myths about older adults.

Here are six of them.

Myth No. 1: Depression is more prevalent

Research shows that our emotional well-being actually improves until the 70s when it levels off. Even centenarians report overall high levels of wellbeing. What we seem to be able to do is to focus on positive rather than negative emotions, memories and stimuli and that leads, overall, to a more positive outlook.

Myth No. 2: Cognitive decline is inevitable

Around the age of 30 our brains begin to shrink. We don't do as well on cognitive tests as younger adults. But barring dementia, in the real world we do just fine.

Myth No. 3: Older workers are less productive

This view is pervasive and wrong. Study after study shows virtually no relationship between age and job performance. Dig deeper into those studies and you'll find that, on balance, older employees' productivity and reliability is higher than that of their younger colleagues.

In the workplace, at least, older often means better. We just have to convince employers of that.

Myth No. 4: Loneliness is more likely

Apparently not! The research suggests our moods and overall sense of wellbeing actually improve with age. The explanation: our friendships tend to improve with age and we have fewer problematic relationships with those close to us, like our children and that helps protect against loneliness.

That doesn't mean that there are not lonely older adults out there but as a group we are less lonely than young people.

Myth No. 5: Creativity declines with age

Creativity comes in all shapes and sizes and as it turns out all ages. People like Mark Twain, Frank Lloyd Wright and Paul Cézanne did some of their best work in their 40s, 50s and 60s.

Myth No. 6: More exercise is better

Exercise can improve health and longevity but the law of diminishing returns comes into play here. A little exercise can be good; a lot can actually be harmful. So swap out the marathons for a brisk walk every day.

Tergesen's piece about aging is a welcome one but growing older has its share of challenges. Some people don't age as well as others. Estimates are that we need to be concerned about the emotional well-being of approximately 10 per cent of our seniors. Health considerations and the loss of a partner are a part of life as we age. Rates of depression in nursing homes is frightfully high. And it's hard to thrive if you are poor.

But for most of us friendships, creativity and satisfaction with life can flourish as we age. That's something to be thankful for especially at this time of the year.

I hope you are surrounded by love and warmth this holiday season. Merry Christmas.

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