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7 Ways Denial Can Ruin Your Health

Ignoring real changes to your mind and body can be a trap

By Linda Melone | January 31, 2014



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While it's tempting to ignore the aging process and carry on as if you're still 30, being in denial can have a serious negative impact on your health, according to a recent news [release](#) from The Family Institute of Northwestern University.

"Denial is a psychological defense mechanism often used to either deny or minimize reality — despite evidence to the contrary," says Prakash Masand, M.D., CEO of Global Medical Education and a former consulting professor of psychiatry at Duke University.

Stay healthy as you age by avoiding these seven common denial traps:

1. You believe you can work out with the same intensity as in your 30s. Doing the same workout today that you did 20 years ago can easily result in injury, says David W. Kruse, M.D., sports medicine specialist at Hoag Orthopedic Institute, Irvine, Calif.

"Normal physiologic changes occur in everyone despite how in shape you are," he says. Issues like joint restrictions or inflexibility can create imbalances. These may lead to muscle or tendon tears, or to overuse syndromes such as tendinitis. Prevent problems by varying your workout and progressing gradually, within your abilities.

(**MORE:** [5 Celebs Turning 50 Who Defy Age](#))

2. You think your healthy lifestyle absolves you from recommended checkups. Many health issues present no symptoms and may be genetic, making screening checkups even more important as you age.

High blood pressure, colon cancer, breast cancer and hyperlipidemia (high cholesterol), for example, often do not cause symptoms until late stages of the disease, says Howard Sawyer, M.D., internal medicine specialist with Healthcare Partners Medical Group, Los Angeles, Calif.

(**MORE:** [Welcome to Age 50: Top Health and Wellness Tips](#))

Another plus for checkups: a medical professional reviews your risk factors, diet and family history and makes sure

you're up to date on vaccinations.

3. You imbibe with the same gusto as you did in college. Your body processes alcohol less efficiently as you age, so the same amount of alcohol has a greater effect, says Sawyer. Plus, he says, "when you combine alcohol with medications such as some blood pressure meds that cause dizziness, it can lead to falls."

(MORE: [How to Drink More Wine Smartly and Healthfully](#))

Alcohol use can make medical conditions such as ulcers, diabetes and high blood pressure worse, too. Women should limit themselves to one drink a day and men to no more than two.

4. You downplay feelings of depression. Pushing aside feelings of depression or anxiety can make these problems more severe in the long run, says Francine Rosenberg, a Parsippany, N.J. clinical psychologist. "The earlier you initiate treatment the more successful it will be," she says.

Rosenberg says you should seek help if a trusted friend or family member expresses concern about you. Other signs you may be depressed include becoming socially isolated, a drop in your work performance and suicidal or homicidal thoughts.

5. You forget a lot of things, but feel you're too young for Alzheimer's. Although Alzheimer's disease typically develops after age 60, in rare cases an early-onset form can occur between age 30 and 60, according to the National Institute of Aging.

Some memory loss naturally occurs with aging, but general forgetfulness (not remembering a person's name) doesn't interfere with one's life, says Paul Bendheim, M.D., clinical professor of neurology at the University of Arizona College of Medicine.

"Symptoms such as not recognizing the room or being unable to use the items found in it, may be signs of dementia," he says. Mood and personality changes and repeating questions signal that you should schedule an evaluation with a health professional.

6. You insist you're not hard of hearing. Age-related hearing impairment affects 18 percent of adults ages 45 to 64. The percentage rises to 30 for people 65 to 74, according to the National Institute of Deafness and Other Communication Disorders.

Problem is, only one in five people who could benefit from a hearing aid actually wears one.

Not addressing hearing loss can also lead to other problems, including social isolation and depression, says Eric P. Wilkinson, M.D., ear and skull base surgeon at St. Vincent Medical Center, Los Angeles, Calif.

Beyond that, new studies show a possible link between the age-related hearing loss and cognitive disorders such as dementia, Wilkinson says.

Take this short [quiz](#) to determine if it's time to see a doctor.

7. You deny you snore. Approximately 90 million American adults snore, according to the National Sleep Foundation. Keeping your partner awake can not only become a serious relationship issue, snoring may also be a sign of something else, says Allen Towfigh, M.D., a board-certified sleep medicine doctor with Weill Cornell Medical Center/New York Presbyterian Hospital.

It's important to investigate the cause of snoring and treat any associated conditions, such as obstructive sleep apnea or hypertension, Towfigh says. Often, a simple change in sleeping position or an oral appliance can reduce or stop snoring altogether.

[Next Avenue](#) contributor Linda Melone is a California-based freelance writer specializing in health, fitness and wellness for women over 50.