



The Mosaic

A Masterpiece Living Network Newsletter About Living Well

Assets or Burdens

By: Teresa Beshwate, MPH, PCC

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Older people were once key members of society, the keepers of wisdom and information critical to survival. The Industrial Revolution marked a new era focused on productivity, and suddenly more value was placed on output and efficiency and less on wisdom. As a result, older adults were no longer viewed as valuable or necessary. Their status in society quickly went from asset to burden.

Today's rampantly ageist society still tends to view older adults as burdens. Their sheer numbers and their "entitlements," take center stage.

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Five Popular Brain Myths

Part 1 of 2

By: Dr. Rob Winninham, PhD

There are quite a few myths out there about human brains. In this two-part series we will debunk some of the more popular myths.

1. Myth: We only use 10% of our brain. This is probably the most striking and well-known myth about the brain. And, we are not exactly sure where or how this myth started. It is not true that we only use 10% of our brains. We use ALL of our brains, and damaging even a small part of the brain can lead to significant deficits.

2. Myth: Drinking alcohol kills brain cells. It is a fact that heavy drinking has been associated with cognitive deficits and a type of dementia known as Korsakoff Syndrome, but alcohol does not directly kill brain cells. However, heavy drinking can affect how brain cells communicate with each other, which might lead to cognitive deficits. So, while it is a myth that alcohol kills brain cells, the research suggests we should avoid heavy drinking in order to maximize brain health.

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Finding the "You" You Were Always Meant to Be

By: Danielle Palli

"I'm a totally different person," Irene Stange told the Mosaic. "I've become the person I was always meant to be."

To see Irene today, you would assume that she's always been a bubbly social butterfly involved in everything from circuit class to crotchet and flower arranging to volunteering in the health center. But this was not always the case. Throughout most of her life, Irene described herself as quiet. "I was the one in the back pew at church," she said. "I didn't want to be out there." She wasn't one to engage people in conversation or get involved. Her husband, by contrast, was the extrovert.

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What's missed altogether is what older adults contribute to society. Despite our ageist society's misinformed views, older people continue quietly contributing, often unnoticed and perhaps underappreciated. This is partly because their contributions often go unmeasured, since we continue to measure productivity in an antiquated way – work done for pay.

Decades ago, in their book *Successful Aging*, Drs. Rowe and Kahn created a broader and more appropriate definition for productivity: any activity, paid or unpaid, that generates goods or services of economic value. By this definition, the contribution of older adults is immense.

The current value placed on volunteerism is \$25.43 per hour. In 2017 alone, volunteers living in Masterpiece Living partnered communities donated an estimated 587,000 hours of time, talent and experience to worthy causes, an economic impact of over \$14 million.



Volunteerism in the formal sense still doesn't account for caregiving and other types of support contributed to family and friends. Some support can be monetized, for example, in 2017, the national average weekly cost of after-school childcare was \$242 - over \$12,000 per year. Many older adults provide such services to family and friends. Other forms of support are more difficult to monetize – such as taking a meal to an ailing friend, or teaching a new widower to cook for one – but the impact is priceless.

Far from being burdens to society, older adults are the solution to a brighter future.

3. Myth: Medication is our best chance of reducing dementia rates. While we have several approved pharmaceuticals that are used to treat symptoms of some types of dementia (e.g., Aricept and Namenda), we don't have any medications that can help by affecting the underlying causes of dementia. Nor do we have a pharmaceutical that can cure dementia by permanently reversing the pathology or symptoms. We have spent billions of dollars trying to find such medications, but we haven't made much, if any, real progress. In 2018, Pfizer even announced it was halting research designed to find a pharmaceutical to treat dementia, in part because the lack of success and the bleak outlook. This may sound bleak, but there is a plethora of research showing lifestyle behaviors can affect chances of developing dementia.



4. Myth: We have only five senses. This is basic, right? We have five senses: hearing, sight, taste, touch, and smell, right? Wrong! If we define a sense as something we have sensory receptors to detect, and a part of our brain then processes those inputs, then we have many more senses. Here are just some of the other senses we have.

- Pain (sensed by nociceptors)
- Heat (sensed by thermoreceptors)
- Cold (sensed by thermoreceptors)
- Proprioception or knowing where our body is (proprioceptive receptors)
- At least 3 types of touch receptors (known as mechanoreceptors)
- Balance (vestibular receptors in inner ear)

5. Myth: We have 100 billion brain cells. This myth has been propagated in textbooks and articles for many years, without any reference to a published study. But in 2009, a study was published that estimated the number of neurons at 86 billion, give or take. But another myth might have been debunked with the 2009 study, and that is that we have 10 non-neuronal cells for every neuron. That also has appeared in countless textbooks for years (without scientific references), but the ratio appears to be closer to a 1:1.

Science is self-correcting, we are constantly learning, revising and increasing our understanding of the world. I have no doubt that some of what we think is fact today will be found to be incomplete or wrong in the future. Accepting new knowledge and evidence requires mental flexibility; I suppose doing so is a form of brain exercise that keeps our minds nimble.

(Finding the "You" You Were Always Meant to Be - Continued from Page 1)

Then she moved into Oak Trace (a Lifespace community) and that all changed. Her husband passed away following a battle with Parkinson's Disease and dementia. Irene spent the first two months isolated, but then eventually began to accept people's invitations to connect. She became involved with Masterpiece Living programming at Oak Trace, met other likeminded people, and her world did a 180-degree turn. "Masterpiece Living did a number on me," she laughs. "I now follow Masterpiece to the Nth degree."

Environment, she feels, is everything. In more ways than one! When someone discovered that Irene was a former interior designer, they asked if she would design an apartment to be used as a model for prospective residents. They showed her a few pieces of furniture to include, and she set to work on the design. "I didn't expect that at my age, after I had retired, I'd be asked to design it, but I had fun doing it!" She jokes that she has "placement genes in her brain," and she always has an eye for how things should look. Similarly, having found a community with many opportunities to connect with others and try new experiences is – in her mind – the right place to be.



Today, Irene can't stress enough two pieces of advice – one for existing residents and one for new residents. For existing residents, she would advise: "Give new people time. It's overwhelming for them, many of whom are downsizing from a home or dealing with loss." She suggests they offer to give new residents a tour, giving them tips about where things are located, and "give them your phone number and tell them to call any time with questions." To new people, she suggests that they take their time getting settled, to take people up on their offers for dinner or to ask questions, and then – when the time is right – get involved.

Irene admits she's still building on her "true self." After given the opportunity to represent Oak Trace at their annual board meeting, she attended, but passed on speaking publicly. Later, she promised herself that if there was a next time, she would. That opportunity came a few weeks later when she had to make the board meeting report to the Oak Trace resident meeting. She expected to be more nervous than she was. Afterward, all she could say was, "Hey, that was fun!" You just never know until you try.



Have You Tuned In To the Bright Side?



Join a physician, a life coach, a spiritual guru and their guests over coffee and conversation about the bright side of getting older ... that's right, the bright side! Lighthearted, fun and educational, this podcast will leave you with practical tips to brighten your life's journey.

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