

NC Department of Health and Human Services NC Nurse Aide I Curriculum

Module R Cognitive Changes Due to Aging

July 2024

Objectives

1. Discuss the healthy aging brain
2. Identify cognitive changes due to aging
3. Describe the importance of pacing and patience while delivering care to the older adult

Cognition

- Refers to the mental processes involved in thinking, learning, understanding and remembering
- Messages sent to the brain from the five senses are:
 - changed
 - stored in memory
 - recovered from memory
 - used to answer questions
 - used to respond to requests
 - used to perform tasks
- Cognitive function is related to use

The Healthy Aging Brain



Learning in the Older Adults

- The gaining of information, skills, and knowledge
- Older adults learn easier and better when they can set their own pace
- Learning is dependent on memory
- Memory involves the storing of information in the brain for later use

“Use It Or Lose It”



Cognitive Changes Due to Aging

- Size of neurons (brain cells) progressively decrease
- Total brain mass decreases
- Responses slow down
- Increased learning time needed



Cognitive Changes Due to Aging

- Mild short-term memory loss
- Motivation to learn decreases
- Feels threatened when changes are evident in public
- Challenged by more than one task or more than one request
- Unable to ignore external stimuli while performing basic tasks

Understanding Reaction Time

Changes in reaction time vary from person to person

Reaction time decreases gradually after age 60

May be impaired by aging process, sensory deficits or chronic disease

Reaction Time in Older Adults



Responses slow down



Increased time for learning new activities



More difficulty in re-learning motor skills



Decreased ability to process conversation



Decreased reaction time

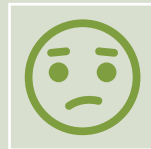
Reaction Time in Older Adults



More deliberate, less frequent responses



Less effective performance when pace is fast



Easily confused at times

Workload of the Nurse Aide



Nurse Aides have multiple tasks to accomplish in a short period of time

Effects of a Fast-Paced Environment for an Older Adult

Resident's ability to learn, perform a task, or maintain motivation can be negatively affected in a fast-paced environment.

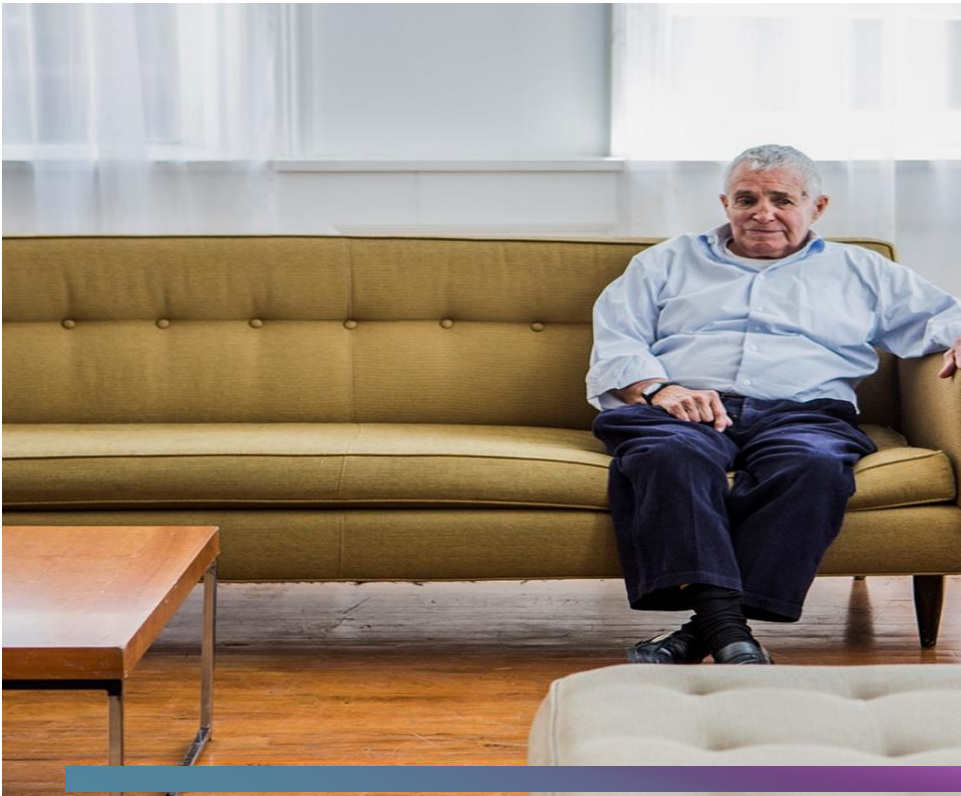


Residents are more cautious and less willing and able to respond quickly



Residents may be less willing to complete task due to fear of failure

Social Breakdown Syndrome



- Occurs if a resident is rushed or not allowed enough time to complete tasks
- Blames self for not being able to keep up
- Begins to feel incompetent with decrease in self-esteem

Social Breakdown Syndrome

Society becomes impatient with those who cannot keep up



Effective Responses by the Nurse Aide

Pacing and patience can be used to offset the effects of a resident's slowed reaction time



Pacing and Patience

Residents who are encouraged to set their own pace:

- Are better able to perform or learn new things
- Will establish enough time to use assets to the best of their abilities
- Feel better about themselves, competent, and in control



Role of Nurse Aide



Inform resident of the task ahead of time



Relate new information or tasks with the past



Identify supplies and equipment needed to complete a task



Demonstrate for the resident what is to be done

Role of Nurse Aide



Ensure hearing aid(s) are in place, glasses are clean and properly worn



Slow down pace when working with residents



Allow the resident to set the pace



Provide time for the resident to focus

The End