19.1: Care of the Older Adult Introduction

Learning Objectives

• Consider all aspects of diversity, including age
• Differentiate between normal and abnormal findings for older adults
• Detail specific adaptations in patient care to accommodate the needs of older adults

The needs of the older adult population will continue to influence health care through this century. The aging "baby boomer" population, along with an increased average life span of Americans, has led to an increased number of older adults and is only expected to grow. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that 1 in 5 Americans will be over the age of 65 by 2030, and by 2034, the number of older individuals will outnumber children for the first time in U.S. history.¹

Each individual ages in their own way, and the physical, psychosocial, and cognitive health of older individuals varies widely. Because of this broad scope of health and illness in the aging population, providing nursing care that meets the needs of each older adult can be challenging. Additionally, although there are common physiological changes that occur with aging, many individuals ignore symptoms by erroneously attributing them to the aging process. For example, many older adults mistakenly believe that pain from arthritis is a normal part of growing older and do not seek treatment, resulting in decreased physical activity that puts them at increased risk for developing chronic disease. Providing individualized nursing care and patient education to older adults can promote effective preventative health care and self-management that maintains and enhances their quality of life.² Let’s begin by reviewing basic concepts related to the aging process.