



How Old You Feel Depends on Your Age

Adapted by Personal Safety Nets® from “How Old Do You Feel? It Depends on Your Age” by Sarah Arnquist in the New York Times (June, 2009).

The older people become, the younger they feel and the more likely they are to see “old age” as a time occurring later in life, according to a national survey on aging released on Monday.

“There’s a saying that you’re never too old to feel young, and boy, have older Americans today taken that one to heart,” said Paul Taylor, executive vice president with the Pew Research Center and the survey’s principal author. He said this is the broadest survey the nonpartisan research center has ever done to gauge Americans’ views on aging.

Currently, about 40 million Americans, or one in eight, are 65 and older. By 2050, one in five American will be in that age group. The center surveyed about 3,000 adults 18 and older via land and cellular telephone lines in February and March of this year.

The survey found not just a gap between actual age and the age people say they feel, but also that the gap between reality and perception increases with age.

Most adults over age 50 feel at least 10 years younger than their actual age, the survey found. One-third of those between 65 and 74 said they felt 10 to 19 years younger, and one-sixth of people 75 and older said they felt 20 years younger.

On average, survey respondents said old age begins at 68. But few people over 65 agreed; they said old age begins at 75. Respondents under 30 said 60 marked the beginning of old age.

“Old age is always a bit older than you are,” said Jeffrey Love, research director at AARP.

The researchers also asked young adults what they expect aging to be like and older Americans how it actually is. Younger people tend to think growing old will be worse than the elderly report, the survey team found.

Older adults said they had experienced the negative aspects of aging — including illness, loneliness and financial difficulty — far less often than younger people anticipated. But older participants also said they found less time for family and leisure activities than younger adults expected they would when they reach old age. “Human beings have trouble coming to terms with the unknown,” Mr. Taylor said. “Growing old is a great unknown in the lives of everyone who is not yet old.”

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