

BETTER WITH AGE?

HOW YOUNG PEOPLE SEE SENIORS AND THE AGING PROCESS

Some fear physical frailty while others look forward to having more time for hobbies, but which preconceptions are right, and which are wrong? We surveyed 2,000 people aged 16-34 then checked their beliefs against the evidence to find out.

WE ASKED: WHAT AGE IS 'OLD'?

59

Female respondents chose 61 as 'old,' whereas those identified as male went with 56.

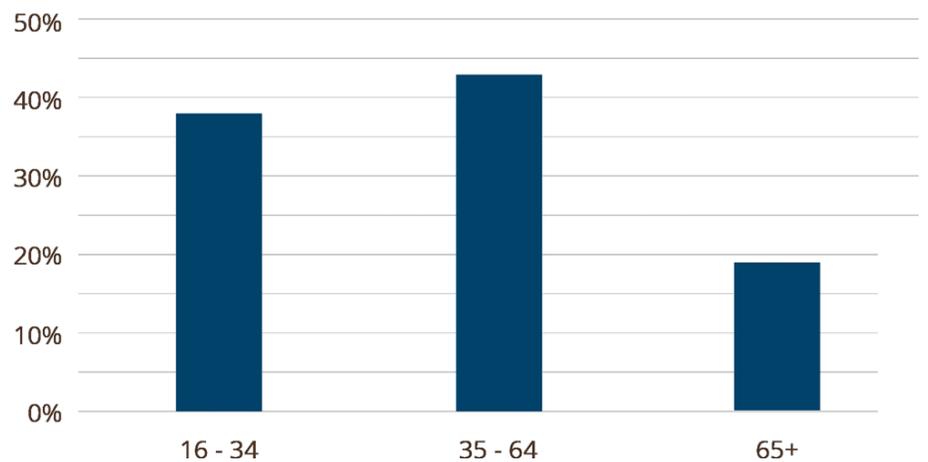
PERCEPTIONS OF AGING

#1

“People’s driving skills decline as they age.”

What young people think:72%
TRUE**Research says:**7%
UNSURE FALSE**MOSTLY
FALSE**

Contrary to popular belief, older drivers aren't all that more dangerous than their younger counterparts. According to the [Federal Highway Safety Administration](#), drivers aged 65+ make up 19% of crash victims, which is twice as low as drivers aged 16-34 who make up 38%.

Fatal crash victims by broad age group

In another [study by Consumer Reports](#), seniors were found to have fewer crashes per mile driven than their younger counterparts, while [research from the University of Swansea](#) suggests that drivers aged 17 to 21 are four times more likely to crash their car than senior drivers.

#2

“As people age, they become lonelier.”

What young people think:

42%

TRUE

UNSURE

Research says:

25%

FALSE

MOSTLY TRUE

Indeed, the time we spend alone increases as we get older. According to [analysis of the American Time Use Survey](#), by age 60 we spend more than of 6 hours a day completely unaccompanied, a number that goes up to 8 when we hit 80. That said, the youngest generation – ‘Generation Z’ – is reported to feel the most lonely of all, according to a [study by Cigna](#).

- *By all accounts, loneliness is on the rise. In fact, it's become such an issue that governments have begun getting involved to tackle the problem.*

On an individual level, people can take the initiative to engage in purposeful activities that build connections. There's new research exploring how empathy and compassion can prevent loneliness, and helping others – even in seemingly small ways – can have an enormous impact.

Joe Casey, retirement coach

#3

“People like their bodies less when they get old.”

What young people think:

54%
TRUE

UNSURE

15%

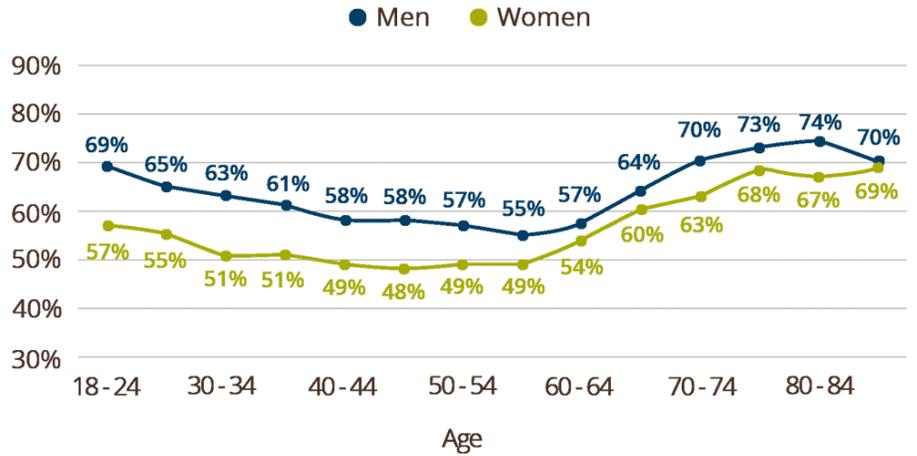
FALSE

Research says:

FALSE

As we age, so do our bodies. However, contrary to what young people believe, that doesn't mean we like them less. A [Gallup poll of 85,145 American adults](#) found that our perception of our own appearance peaks when we're in our 70s and 80s.

Perception of own appearance by age group, % of people who rated it 4 or 5 out of 5



#4

“As people get older, their physical health and general mobility decline.”

What young people think:

87%

TRUE

Research says:

2%

FALSE

TRUE

As much as we would like this to be false, there's little we can do about our aging bodies. [Medical research](#) points to the fact that after reaching 50, we lose 12-14% of our muscular strength with every decade. Unsurprisingly, we're 30-40% more likely to fall over after the age of 60.

It's not all doom and gloom, however. According to the [World Health Organisation](#), reduced mobility among Americans aged 65 or older is down 25%, while the Institute for Exercise and Environmental Medicine [claims](#) over-60s still have a chance to regain the heart health of someone decades younger through exercise.

#5

“When people get older, they lose touch with modern technology.”

What young people think:

55%

TRUE

UNSURE

Research says:

16%

FALSE

**MOSTLY
FALSE**

Seniors might not have the same skills when it comes to handling gadgets and technology, but it doesn't mean they're not actively using

them. Pew Research Center [found](#) that 67% of senior Americans use the internet, and 51% have broadband at home.

Another [study](#) by Pew found 64% of people aged 50-64 and 37% of those aged 65+ use social media, while 70% of older people who use Facebook use it [on a daily basis](#).

#6

“After the age of 60, people’s sex lives generally decline.”

What young people think:

52%

TRUE

UNSURE

Research says:

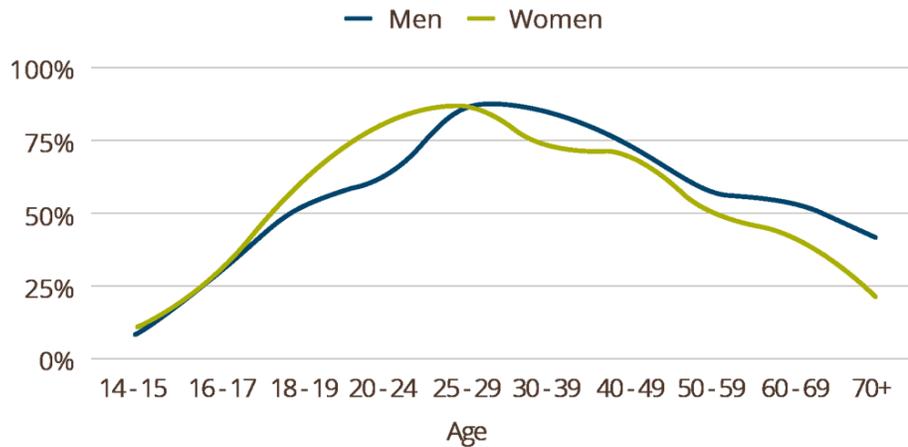
12%

TRUE

FALSE

Coming from the generation that’s [less sexually active](#) than their parents and grandparents were when they were young, this one’s a little rich. Although true in essence – we do have less sex as we age – the decline isn’t all that sharp, with 52% of men and 42% of women aged 60-69 reporting having sexual intercourse in the past year [in a national study](#).

Percentage that had sexual intercourse in the past year, 2017



57% of adults over 60 claimed to be sexually active in a [2011 study](#), while [a 2018 poll](#) found that 76% of those aged 65 or more believe that sex is an integral part of relationships at any age.

#7

“When people get old, they have less of a sense of adventure and are less inclined to travel.”

What young people think:

27%

Research says:

45%

FALSE

As evidenced by [AARP studies](#) from recent years, Baby Boomers (aged 50+) were taking 4-5 trips a year, as many as Generation X (35 - 49). Other [research](#) suggests that, while perhaps less inclined to travel internationally, 50% of Baby Boomers take leisure trips within in the U.S., more than any other age group.

“There’s a great misconception that aging is the same for everyone. There are significant individual differences in how people experience aging, and this includes our desire to travel to far-flung destinations – something many people may not have possessed in the first place.

Cultivating a sense of adventure is important and something most of us can and do incorporate into our lives in some way, regardless of our age. It doesn't have to mean scaling Everest – the key is curiosity and being open to new experiences. Some might love a safari or camping trip, while taking a course or trying a new restaurant is an adventure for others.

Joe Casey, retirement coach

#8

“People become an economic burden on society when they

reach old age.”

What young people think:

Research says:

12%

65%

FALSE

TRUE UNSURE

FALSE

It appears that young people don't subscribe to this old stereotype. And rightly so, as an [Oxford Economics report](#) found that the "longevity economy" is one of the most vital in the U.S. People over 50 are only 35% of the U.S. population, but contribute 43% of total U.S. GDP with their contribution amounting to \$7.4 trillion annually.

#9

“Dementia is an inevitable result of old age.”

What young people think:

Research says:

22%

47%

FALSE

TRUE UNSURE

FALSE

Even though dementia can be very debilitating, a fresh [study from the National Bureau of Economic Research](#) suggests it affects only 10.5% of adults aged 65 or over. An even more encouraging finding comes from a [pan-European study](#) that concluded the dementia rate in older people has dropped 23% in the past 20 years.

#10

“As people grow old, they become less happy.”

What young people think:

15%

TRUE UNSURE

Research says:

55%

FALSE

FALSE

Research suggests that old age isn't associated with unhappiness. A [study from Princeton University](#) shows that after a certain decline in middle age, happiness and well-being start increasing again in the 50s and by 70 we are happier than we were in our 20s.

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO

Top 5 things young people are most excited about when it comes to growing old:

- 1 Having more time to spend with loved ones
- 2 Having more time to travel
- 3 Having more time to get into a hobby
- 4 Caring less about what others think of you
- 5 Spending time with grandchildren

There's more within our control that we can influence than we tend to think. Our attitude is an asset that we can take charge of and use to our advantage. It's important to be conscious of the lifestyle adjustments that may be necessary over time, but you should focus more on what you can do than what you can't.

There are plenty of opportunities for social connection and to help others that can keep loneliness at bay. Intergenerational social interactions are particularly valuable, as spending time with people outside of your own age group can be mutually beneficial.

You should also examine and challenge your own beliefs about aging. Advances in medical research are leading to better ways to treat various conditions and enhance quality of life, so you might be surprised to learn that some of your ideas about aging are outdated or inaccurate.

Joe Casey, retirement coach



Methodology

The survey involved 2,032 U.S. respondents and was conducted by Censuswide 23-24 October 2018. Research sources were selected for relevance and authority. Joe Casey is a retirement coach with a master's degree in gerontology, and co-hosts the podcast The Retirement Conversation.

*Stay In
Touch*

