



**Mind:** The Next 'ism'  
**Body:** 'Do-Overs' Cost More and Take Longer  
**Spirit:** Valuable Lessons

## The Next 'ism'



Take a moment to think about the jokes you laugh at and the birthday cards you buy.

What images of aging and older persons do these reflect? Is this a picture you want to embrace, and is this a perspective you want to promote? Do you or would you like to be perceived this way?

June was Seniors' month, offering an ideal opportunity to explore and challenge our explicit and perhaps unintentional beliefs, myths, values and fears about growing older.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines ageism as *"...the stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination against people on the basis of their age."* The WHO speaks further about the harmful effects this has on older adults, and suggests that this is even more widespread, accepted, and 'normalized,' than racism and sexism.

## 10 Common Examples of Ageism:

- A service clerk or health care/social service professional speaks to an older adult through their adult children or caregiver.
- An individual speaks extra slowly to an older adult in a loud and high pitched 'singsong' voice, while using basic simplistic language.
- Automatic assumption of physical and/or cognitive decline.
- Tell people they 'look good for their age.'
- Describe older persons as being 'adorable' or 'precious' for participating in regular adult activities.
- Refer to everyday forgetfulness as a 'senior moment.'
- Call older persons 'dearie' or 'sweetie.'
- Use negative references for older persons, such as 'old fogey' or 'little old lady.'
- Promote 'anti-aging' products and procedures.
- Assume all older persons are technically challenged.

## Impact of Ageism:

Workplace: Seeking 'new graduates' leading to limited workplace and career opportunities. Ageism can also stoke workplace resentment by suggesting that older colleagues are holding onto the best positions.

**Appreciate      Respect      Value**

**Elevating the way the world sees and serves the age 50+.**

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**Society:** Blame older adults for current and emerging social, health and financial societal challenges.

**Cognitive Health:** According to Dr. Levy, a Psychologist from Yale University, older persons exposed and primed to negative stereotypes showed reduced scores on memory, math, and general cognitive ability tests when compared to those exposed to positive stereotypes.

**Longevity:** Dr. Levy also cites longitudinal studies revealing that those embracing positive stereotypes of aging tended to live up to 7.5 years longer than those holding onto negative stereotypes.

**Health Care Service:** Older persons have a greater likelihood to be over or under medicated from health professionals.

**Psychological Health:** Vulnerable to *'Internalized Oppression'* where older adults assume the negative stereotypes and accept that definition of themselves. There is a further risk that because of these negative images, some older persons will reject communities and activities associated with aging.

### **What We Can Do:**

There is a danger in generalizing impact to any group – especially a group as large as our maturing population. Although not everyone will accept and internalize negative stereotypes and statements, it is probably pretty safe to declare that this practice does NOT contribute to well-being.

If you are not sure if something is ageist, try substituting the name of another marginalized group. Substitute 'older person' with a specific ethnic, religious group or gender reference. Would this statement or belief be acceptable? Probably not.

Many will hopefully have the privilege of living long enough to claim the distinction of being an 'older adult' in our society. We must be mindful to not contaminate the well we will be drinking from in years to come.

Rhonda Latreille, MBA, CPCA  
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### **'Do-Overs' Cost More and Take Longer**

According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, joint replacement surgery has increased in the past 5 years. Hip replacements are up 17.4% during this time period, and knee replacements increased 17%.

Interestingly, repeat surgeries (also called revision surgeries) actually cost 80% more than the original surgery and require a more than double hospital stay and recovery.

### **Valuable Lessons**

"I know that only by owning who and what you are can you start to step into the fullness of life. Every year should be teaching us all something valuable. Whether you get the lesson is really up to you."

*Oprah Winfrey*