

## Common Illnesses Among Elder People

Our body organs typically begin to degenerate at age 30 onwards and this deterioration brings about various illnesses and disorders, both physical and mental. Depression may also set in among those who have chronic physical illness that impedes one's ability to carry on a normal life or among those who live alone. Proper care of one's health helps reduce physical ailments when we grow older.



## Common Illnesses Among Elder People

**Neuro disorders:** Are common among those with high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, diabetes, obesity, heart disease, stress, lack of exercise, smoking, or hereditary illnesses. Degeneration of brain cells commonly occur at age 60 onwards. Common neuro disorders include Alzheimer's disease and hemorrhages.

**Gout:** Are more common among older men rather than women. Joint pain are usually due to accumulation of excess uric acid in the body, especially at joints. Uric acid levels in the blood vary with age.

**Diabetes:** Is an abnormality whereby the body produces insufficient levels of insulin, resulting in high blood sugar levels. This causes symptoms such as frequent thirst, fatigue, unexplained loss of body weight, and other complications such as blurred vision, blindness, kidney deterioration, numbness of fingertips, toes or prone to bacterial infections.

**High blood pressure:** Normal blood pressure levels range between 120/80 – 139/89 mm Hg. Levels higher than this range are considered to be high. High blood pressure diseases usually do not produce symptoms but may reveal itself in bouts of heart palpitations, headaches, dizziness, and blurred vision. Failure to seek treatment in its early stage may lead to other complications such as paralysis, blindness, kidney failure, and heart attack.

**Urinary problems:** Prostate ailments are found in elderly males, causing difficulty urinating, abnormal frequency, incomplete urination or prone to urinary tract infections. Among women, common illnesses include poor bladder control or urinary tract abnormalities.

**Prostrate Cancer** are common among those age 60 or more and are caused by hormone imbalances causing prostate abnormalities among males, a high cholesterol diet, or genetics. Early stages of prostate cancer are usually not revealed by symptoms.

**Eye diseases:** Common eye diseases found among the elderly include cataract, glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy. While there are many causes, most are due to degeneration along with aging and results in impaired vision.

**Kidney diseases:** Symptoms are not obvious in the early stage but further deterioration will impair its functions and accumulate toxins. Symptoms will become more noticeable as fatigue, swelling, and high blood pressure. Regular symptoms may be signs of chronic kidney failure which will accompanied by pale appearance, rash, loss of appetite. These conditions may require treatments such as kidney dialysis, hemodialysis, or ultimately a kidney transplant.

**Ischemic Heart Disease:** Primary cause is from restricted coronary arteries which could be fatal. It is common among diabetics, those with high blood pressure, smokers, obesity, and lack of exercise. Family members with arterial diseases and heart diseases will heighten one's chance as well. Main symptoms are chest pains, difficulty breathing, and muscle pain around neck and inner left arm. Related symptoms may include cold sweats, loss of body temperature, dizziness, shortness of breath, difficulty lying flat, and heart palpitations. Chest pains should be followed promptly with a doctor visit.

#### **Basic healthcare guidelines during our senior years**

- Proper nutrition, including avoiding high cholesterol food, salty food, and sweet items.
- Avoid smoking or alcohol
- Drink plenty of fluids the body needs
- Exercise appropriately at least 3 days a week for 30 minutes each session
- Keep body weight within standard range
- Positive mental attitude and adequate rest
- Avoid unnecessary medication or rely on over-the-counter drugs
- See physician regularly
- Regular health check-up every 6-12 months

Sources:

Kom Chad Luek newspaper;

Thai Health Promotion Foundation <http://www.thaihealth.or.th>