

Trading Ages:

Putting Yourself in the Shoes of an Older Patient



Many seniors may be dealing with issues you cannot see, such as issues of loss or life changes. That's why it's all the more important to notice those issues that you can help with by simply changing how you interact with your older patients. Problems with hearing and vision are two great examples. Here's how you can spot problems and how you can help.

Common Geriatric Conditions

Hearing Loss

Changes in hearing

- Decreased ability to hear differences between similar words
- Impact may be greater than other losses
- Most common type of hearing loss: decreased ability to hear intensity or volume

Signs of hearing loss

- Asking for things to be repeated or confusing similar words
- Blank looks, disorientation, inappropriate responses (nodding or saying yes)
- Isolation and withdrawal from social interactions
- Not reacting to loud noises (like a slamming door) or finding a source of sound
- Reacting with frustration or anger when asked if they have trouble hearing

What you can do

- Stand in front of patients, face them and make sure they are aware you are speaking to them.
- Speak slightly louder, but don't shout.
- Use short sentences and repeat key phrases. Reword if necessary.
- Ask if you are clearly heard and consider asking patients to repeat back the most important instructions or information.
- Reduce background noise if possible.

Vision Loss

Changes in vision

- Difficulty adjusting to changes in light
- Harder to tell colors apart
- Loss of peripheral vision, making it harder to see out of the corners of the eyes

Signs of vision loss

- Bumping into things, like chairs or walls
- Having difficulty identifying faces or objects
- Holding written material close to face
- Shuffling feet or walking with uncertainty

What you can do

- Give them time to read printed materials.
- Mark where signatures are needed on forms.
- Use dark print on a light background.
- Use larger font sizes.