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Growing Old Gracefully

For those of us who are entering “older adulthood” (this sounds better than “old age” or “senior citizen”), the adjustment can be challenging. In a culture that worships youth, beauty and fitness, how do we “grow old gracefully?” It’s especially difficult for women in our society. Women of a certain age seem to disappear from view. Little attention is paid to the woman with greying hair, a less than firm body and “mature” skin. Men manage better during this life transition. Greying or thinning hair is seen as distinguished and a less than perfect body is generally not criticized.

So how does a woman gracefully enter this stage of life and manage to maintain a positive self-image and mood? I have a few suggestions that are not empirically tested and proven. However, they do come from my knowledge of life stages, experience as a therapist and wisdom that comes with age as I occupy this peculiar life transition.

* Make every effort to avoid comparing yourself to T.V. and movie celebrities
* Exercise regularly
* Focus on what you have accomplished rather than what you haven’t
* Practice self-compassion
* Practice healthy sleep habits
* Keep a sense of humor

The ability to accomplish even one of the above bullet points will be helpful. Please consider that state of mind influences our mental as well as physical well-being. Allowing factors such as physical illnesses and/or chronic pain to cause a depressed mood needs to be challenged. It has been researched and proven that focusing our attention on primarily negative situations and circumstances will bring on depression whereas practicing gratitude and keeping a positive mindset will prevent depression and anxiety.

Thinking about unrealized goals or having regrets are unavoidable. However, dwelling on them is counterproductive to a sense of well-being. Remaining as active as possible is body and mind will provide the energy needed to “grow old gracefully”. Celebrating another birthday can be welcomed rather than dreaded. It’s all part of living our best life.

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