

## **The autism spectrum: Issues of ageing**

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In the typical population memory and cognitive functions tend to decline with age, in autism these tend to improve with age. Research shows face recognition, for example, gets better in autism as we age but sensory issues may increase.

Although we face some of the same physical and mental problems of all ageing people, we may need various types of support to ensure our growing old happens with safety, dignity and in the way we personally hope for.

Finding the right social support, appropriate housing, accommodations for sensory, learning and motor differences, are key to ageing well. There are older autistic individuals who lack a voice, there are even more who can speak but may not know how to recognize and/or communicate their needs, wants, hopes and dreams. Good mental health and reduced anxiety are extensions of provision that is done well.

In autism we need support in non-typical formats that work for us. For example, I might have difficulties getting organized, accessing appropriate services, managing my affairs, a budget, the housework, medical appointments, tax returns, my garden, home maintenance, or a telephone directory; but, I might have even more difficulty speaking on the phone, answering the door or talking to neighbours. So, the often usual routes to gaining and sharing information might be off limits to me.

All of the above is true whether individuals have a single or dual diagnosis.