



As You Age Curriculum for Senior Adults

A series of twelve lessons to actively engage older adults in learning about their beliefs, knowledge, and practices related to aging, health, and nutritional issues.

Written by:

Kathleen M. Stadler, Ph.D., Assistant Professor
Dept. of Human Nutrition, Foods and Exercise; Extension
Specialist, Nutrition; Virginia Tech
339 Wallace Hall (0430)
Blacksburg, VA 24061
540-231-8768
stadler@vt.edu

Pamela B. Teaster, Ph.D., Assistant Professor
Dept. of Human Development; Extension Specialist,
Gerontology; Virginia Tech.
237 Wallace Hall
Blacksburg, VA 24061
540-231-2348
pteaster@vt.edu

Overview

The *As You Age* Curriculum for Senior Adults is a series of twelve mini-lessons to actively engage older adults in learning about their beliefs, knowledge, and practices related to aging, health, and nutritional issues. The *As You Age* curriculum includes a large visual game board, individual participant game boards, game questions, take-home publications, and “As You Age: Your Daily Challenges” evaluation card.

Flexibility and creativity are built into this series to appeal to a variety of older audiences. Lessons may range in length from 15 to 30 minutes depending on audience needs.

In 1998, the authors conducted focus group research with older adults in Virginia that revealed that older persons want educational lessons and supplementary materials presented in a clear, concise, useful, and interactive manner. Educational programs and materials need to utilize high-interest text, activities, and graphics.

The goal of this curriculum is to educate older adults on a variety of topics related to aging and nutritional issues and to improve these practices. The educational objectives for *As You Age* Curriculum for Senior Adults are as follows:

- To learn basics about the aging population.
- To learn health basics for older adults.
- To include socialization in conjunction with proper nutrition.
- To eat the “Food Guide Pyramid Way.”
- To eat more fiber-rich foods.
- To eat more vegetables with Vitamins A and C.
- To eat more fruits with Vitamin A, Vitamin C, antioxidants, and phytonutrients.
- To eat more calcium-rich foods.
- To eat protein-rich foods.
- To practice daily healthy eating and understand its relationship to healthy aging.

“As You Age” Lessons

The curriculum is a series of twelve lessons. The authors recommend beginning the series with the aging-focused lessons followed by the nutrition-focused lessons. Conclude the series with Lesson Twelve. Use the “Modified Food Guide Pyramid for Adults 70+” and “Recipe for Healthy

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"Aging" review cards throughout the series to begin and end each lesson.

The first three lessons in the curriculum focus on these aging issues:

- Issue 1: As You Age...Basics About an Aging Population
- Issue 2: As You Age...Health Basics
- Issue 3: As You Age...Friendship Patterns

The new Modified Food Guide Pyramid for Older Adults 70+ is the foundation for the next eight lessons in the curriculum that focus on nutrition issues:

- Issue 4: As You Age...Eat the "Food Guide Pyramid" Way
- Issue 5: As You Age...Eat More Fiber
- Issue 6: As You Age...Eat More Vegetables with Vitamin C
- Issue 7: As You Age...Eat More Fruits with Antioxidants & Vitamin C
- Issue 8: As You Age...Eat More Vegetables with Vitamin A
- Issue 9: As You Age...Eat More Fruits with Phytonutrients & Vitamin A
- Issue 10: As You Age...Eat More Calcium-Rich Foods
- Issue 11: As You Age...Eat Protein-Rich Foods

The final lesson is Issue 12: As You Age...Putting It All Together. This lesson summarizes the earlier lessons on nutrition and aging. It may also be modified to use at the beginning of the entire series.

The lessons go along with an interactive game, which includes a list of game questions for each lesson, a large visual game board, and individual participant game boards. Creative instructors tailor the questions and visual props for the educational game to match the unique requirements of different older adult audiences.

Lessons may be lengthened or shortened depending on the needs of the older adult participants. For example, lower functioning older adults may lose interest after six to nine questions (two to three for each game board area) as compared to higher functioning older adults, who may have the interest and attention span for more questions, which will take more time. Prizes or a door prize, such as cans of food, may be used to encourage cooperation and maintain the interest of older adults.

Evaluation

The "As you Age: Your Daily Challenges" card is designed to be implemented as pre-test and post-test evaluation instruments for the beginning and ending of the series.

Evaluations may be done after completing several lessons on similar topics, (e.g., after teaching lessons 1-3 or after teaching lessons 4-9).

Collect and tabulate the mean number of practices completed on the pre- and post-test. Report the mean practice scores with positive increases for the total group of older adults and/or for specific practices. For example, 19% of 17 total senior adult participants increased their overall health and wellness practices after participating in three "As You Age" lessons. The largest increases in specific daily practices were eating at least 2 servings of fruits (46%), eating at least 3 servings of calcium rich foods (37%), and learning something new (28%). One participant commented that he learned to fill two quarts of water in the refrigerator each day to make sure he drank enough water for the day and not so much coffee.

Preparation for the Game

The instructor should review the game questions, select which questions will be asked, and number the order of the questions. Many questions are written so that the instructor can insert a variety of items, foods, or visual props that are in-season or available. Select a variety of visual props (paper or flannel pictures, plastic foods, real items, etc.) to illustrate some of the questions. Remember, older adults will be more engaged with visual or tactile learning as compared with only asking a question.

Make copies of the individual participant game boards. Next, select a type of game piece or visual method for participants to cover each game section or square. Game piece examples may include crayons, markers, stickers, dried beans, or uncooked macaroni to color, mark, or cover each game board section. Experiment with different visual methods, which may highlight the focus of the lesson. For example, use fruit stickers or pictures for the fruit lessons.

To-Do List:

- Select and number game questions
- Organize visual props
- Copy game boards
- Select and organize game pieces
- Get an easel or tape for a larger visual game board
- Food prize for winner(s)

How to Play the Game

The instructor asks a question, which may use visual props as the focal point. If the participant answers the question in a positive or correct manner, he or she will color, mark, or place a game piece on the appropriate square. Similarly, the

instructor will color, mark, or cover the corresponding section of the large visual game card to help the participant play the game.

The instructor has the flexibility to select a variety of beliefs, knowledge, and practices of aging, health, and nutritional questions, depending on how and what he or she likes to teach. Instructors are encouraged to write or ask other appropriate questions.

The game may end after any number of questions. The instructor explains how many questions were asked for each area (beliefs, knowledge, and practices) of the board. The participant(s) with the most colored, marked, or covered sections, which designate positive or correct answers, is the winner(s). Each winner is given a food prize or a door prize.

Nutrition Characters

Instructors may use the nutrition characters to help illustrate nutrition concepts, which are discussed in the game. The nutrition characters may be colored or used as a coloring activity with the older adults. Laminate a colored copy, which may be used throughout the series.

Take-Home Publications

The take-home publications include information, activities, and a recipe to complement the educational topics in the game. Instructors may highlight all or part of the information in the publications to encourage self-learning at home.

Program Delivery for Older Adults

1. Be familiar with the special age-related requirements of your audience. Don't speak down to audiences or over their heads.

2. Make sure that the environment is adequately lighted and free from glare. Eliminate distracting noise.
3. Have adequate seating. If possible, place participants in a circle to maximize vision and hearing. Position yourself so that all participants can easily see you.
4. Use graphics and printed materials and in font sizes no smaller than 12 point. White or pastel paper facilitates easy reading.
5. Visuals, such as PowerPoint or transparencies, should be in large font sizes (32 point or greater).
6. Make advance contacts so that you'll know what to do in the event of an emergency.
7. Incorporate a variety of learning styles: visual, auditory, and sensory.
8. If refreshments are served, make provisions for ease of serving and eating food.
9. Provide name tags for all participants.
10. If possible, provide individual contact with participants at the beginning and the ending of the presentation.
11. Have someone on hand to read or write for someone who is having difficulty.

For more information on program delivery for older adults, consult VCE's Aging Wisdom Website, <http://www.ext.vt.edu/vce/specialty/famhumdev/wisdom/wisdom.html>

Additional Resources

Aging:

Blieszner, R., & Adams, R.G. (1992). *Adult friendship*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Gelfand, D. E. (1988). *The aging network: Programs and services*. (3rd Ed.). New York, NY: Springer Publishing Co.

Wacker, R. R., Roberto, K. A., & Piper, L. E. (1998). *Community resources for older adults: Programs and services in an era of change*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

Nutrition:

American Dietetic Association. (1998). *Nutrition & health for older Americans*. American Dietetic Association.

Schlenker, E.D. (1998). *Nutrition in aging*. (3rd Ed.). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

Virginia Cooperative Extension Publications and Programs:

Instructors may encourage older adults to participate in other Extension programs such as Smart Choices Nutrition Education Program (SCNEP), C/O Your Health learn at home newsletter series, Acknowledge Aging, Lunchtime Lessons on Aging, Master Gardeners, etc. Also, promote other Extension publications.

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Checklist of "As You Age" Materials

- Leader's Guide
- Large visual game board
- Individual participant game boards
- Game questions
- Master take-home publications
- Master "Modified Food Guide Pyramid for Adults 70+" card,
- Master "As You Age: Your Daily Challenges" evaluation card
- Master nutrient visuals.