



## Gerontology Sensitivity Kit

### Experience What it Can Feel Like as You Age

Please use these ideas to aid in sensitizing staff to residents' needs. These are only a few examples of changes the elderly may experience.

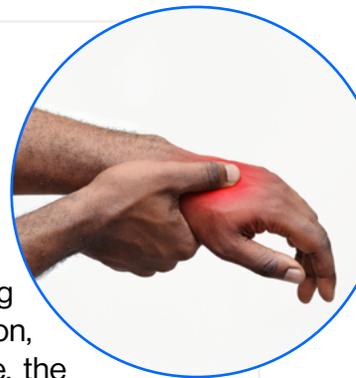
#### Experience 1: Arthritis and Loss of Strength

**Items needed:** gardening gloves, a cup, and a pen

**Challenge:** Attempt to write a sentence, pick up a cup and open a door.

Degenerative joint disease ([osteoarthritis](#)) is a joint disease characterized by deterioration of cartilage lining the joints and new bone formation beneath the cartilage. The disease is very common in older persons and is thought to be inherent in the aging process. Degenerative joint disease is marked by a progressive stiffness, loss of function, and destruction of the larger, weight-bearing joints of the body. With advancing age, the continued slow damage causes increasing disability.

Discover more at the Arthritis Foundation: [arthritis.org](http://arthritis.org)



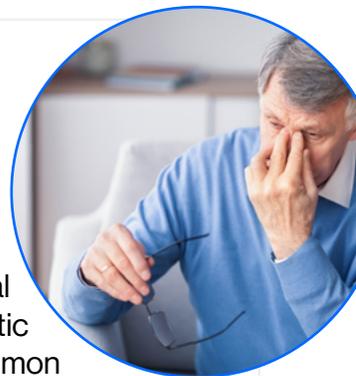
#### Experience 2: Bunions and Neuropathy (pressure ulcers developing)

**Items needed:** small bag of birdseed

**Challenge:** Place a few seeds in shoes and walk to the bathroom.

Peripheral neuropathy often causes numbness and pain in your hands and feet. People typically describe the pain of peripheral neuropathy as tingling or burning. While they may compare the loss of sensation to the feeling of wearing a thin stocking or glove, peripheral neuropathy is caused by nerve damage. It can result from such problems as traumatic injuries, infections, metabolic problems and exposure to toxins. One of the most common causes is diabetes.

To read more, visit [ninds.nih.gov](http://ninds.nih.gov).



### Experience 3: Loss of Vision, Vision Changes, Disorientation

**Items needed:** saran, plastic wrap

**Challenge:** Cover glasses with wrap and attempt to eat, read, turn on TV. Discuss diseases.

There is a wonderful simulation from the Arizona Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired available online at [vision.acbvi.org](http://vision.acbvi.org) that simulates what the world looks like from diseased eyes.

### Experience 4: Arthritis, Loss of a Limb (Examining Frustration with Change)

**Items needed:** masking tape

**Challenge:** Tape two fingers together and pick up a cup to drink. Then tape one arm behind the back to simulate the loss of a limb.

### Experience 5: Feeding by Others

**Items needed:** 1 bag of plastic spoons, 1 pudding cup or baby food

**Challenge:** Feed a participant, then switch and be fed by the participant.



### Experience 6: Loss of Speech, Slurred Speech (stroke, etc.)

**Items needed:** marshmallows

**Challenge:** Place as many marshmallows in a participant's mouth as possible, then have an alarm sound. Have the participant explain verbally what they need to CNAs.

A stroke occurs when the blood supply to part of your brain is interrupted or severely reduced, depriving the brain tissue of oxygen and food. Within minutes, brain cells begin to die. The Kentucky and Southern Indiana Stroke Association has information at [strokekyin.org](http://strokekyin.org).

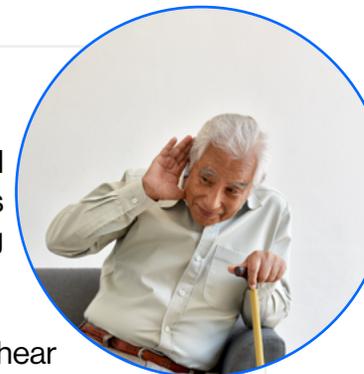
### Experience 7: Hearing Loss, Confusion in Surroundings, Balance

**Items needed:** small bag with cotton balls

**Challenge:** Place cotton balls in both ears. Turn participant facing away from group and continue. Play or make high-pitched sounds. Remind the team that high-pitched sounds are affected early in hearing loss. Increase background noise and note that decreasing background noise allows the resident to focus in on what you are saying.

Age-related hearing loss, also called presbycusis, is the gradual loss of the ability to hear sounds (often high-pitched sounds). This loss of ability occurs so slowly that many people are not aware that they have hearing loss. The most common cause of hearing loss in aging adults is a loss of tiny hair cells in the ear. These cells act as receptors – they vibrate when sounds are present.

The loss of hair cells is largely thought to be due to aging itself, though the following factors may also be important in some cases: The combined effect of a lifetime of exposure to loud noises, such as traffic, construction work, noisy offices, heavy machinery, and loud music. Hereditary factors – people who have family members with hearing loss are more likely to have hearing loss as they age.



Some health conditions, like heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes, can cause presbycusis because they affect the blood supply available to the ear. Some medications, such as aspirin and certain antibiotics, have also been found to contribute to presbycusis.

For a person with presbycusis, sounds seem deeper and less clear. Other symptoms can include: Others' speech seems mumbled or slurred, high-pitched sounds are difficult to hear, conversations are hard to follow, background noise interferes with hearing, men's voices are easier to hear than women's, ringing in the ears (tinnitus).

## Experience 8: Incontinence

**Items needed:** 1 incontinent pad (i.e. Depends)

**Challenge:** Have one participant agree to wear the adult diaper over their clothes. Discuss how it feels and the shameful command "Just use your diaper."