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How Did I Get This Old, This Fast?

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By: Mary Kay Morrison, Humor Academy Founder/Director & AATH Past President

How will I know when I am *old*? As a young child, I decided that it would be when I could not do a cartwheel anymore. I secretly continued to do them. Secretly--because my own internalized ageism had been shaped by a predominant societal norm that play (including cartwheels) is just for kids. Fortunately, my interest in the study of brain research and aging has *flipped* my ageism beliefs upside down. Turns out that exercise (including cartwheels) and incorporating laughter and play into a daily routine will significantly slow the aging process.



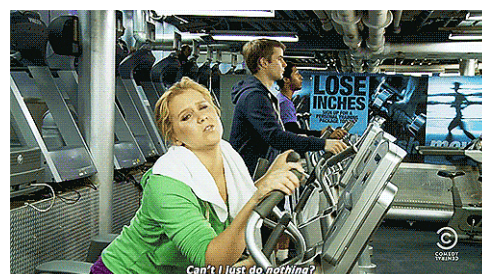
Actual photo of me doing a cartwheel!

Current research indicates that a [youthful frame of mind](#) can have a powerful effect on both physical aging and [mental abilities](#). In a groundbreaking experiment, scientists prepared an environment designed to induce a [younger subjective age](#) in participants. Various methods were used to back-peddle the mindset. One technique involved creating an atmosphere similar to what participants experienced in their teens and early 20's. After a week of living in an environment with the music, movies and atmosphere of their youth, most of these adults became more capable on both physical and mental tasks.

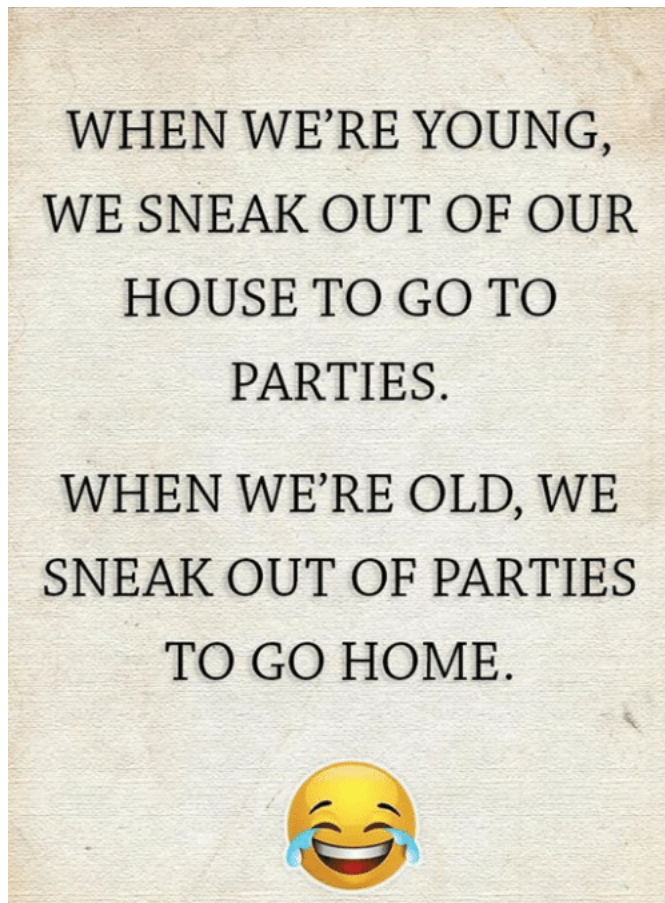
Early in my own career, I became fascinated with brain science. A previous job included reviewing substantial research on the health effects of diet and the [benefits of exercise](#). The impact of reviewing this research has had a significant influence on my personal lifestyle choices which include a pescatarian diet and *striving* to exercise on a regular basis.

"I broke up with my gym. We were not working out."

-Barry Popik



As I continue to study and teach about the [neuroscience of humor](#), I have found that the workshop sessions that I present on "Humor and Aging" are becoming increasingly popular. These sessions begin with participants answering the question: "At what age do you think you become old?" The responses are varied, but after lively conversation, it is generally agreed that age is a [state of mind](#).



Cartoons on aging are plentiful. They usually highlight the physical and mental challenges that are typical of aging. In workshops for seniors, we review cartoons and discuss which ones they think are funny. These cartoons include quotes like “ *I really don’t mind getting older, but my body is taking it badly.*” Most of the time the room is engaged in lively conversation and lots of laughter. However, the first time that I did this exercise, one of the participants looked at me and angrily exclaimed: “There is *nothing* funny about getting old!” As I continued a conversation with her, I realized that she and I were about the same age, and yet we had very different mindsets about aging. The benefit of learning about [humor research](#) through AATH has contributed to my understanding on the importance of finding laughter during life challenges.

As you get older, you’ve got to stay positive. For example, the other day I fell down the stairs...instead of getting upset I just thought: “Wow, that’s the fastest I’ve moved in years.



Play and playfulness are critical components for keeping a youthful mindset. Play generates laughter as well as the exercise needed to keep those rusted body parts in working order. [Playfulness](#) encourages a sense of humor, the tonic for anyone interested in reducing stress and having a positive, optimistic mindset. Some of my favorite examples of playfulness are from the videos and quotes by comedian Tim Conway:

“I spend a lot of time thinking about the hereafter. Each time I enter a room, I wonder what I’m here after.”

- Tim Conway

Dentist Skit (Tim Conway)



“How did I get this old this fast?”

-My Mom

This was actually a lighthearted statement from my mom, Ruth Duncan Wiltz, at age 92. I remember laughing with her as we were reminiscing about the past. These words continue to resonate when I reflect on the unbelievable fact that I am now in my seventies. Turns out that regularly doing those cartwheels, creating snow angels and being a *real* swinger seem to have a positive impact on my mindset.

“We don’t stop playing because we grow old: we grow old because we stop playing.”

George Bernard Shaw

Continue to transform your mindset with exercise, laughter and [Play](#). Your body will thank you for it!

About the Author:



Mary Kay Morrison is an educator who has taught at virtually every level of the educational spectrum, facilitating keynote presentations and workshop sessions for the past 30 years. She is past president of the AATH (Association of Applied and Therapeutic Humor) and founded the AATH Humor Academy graduate studies and CHP (Certified Humor Professional) program. The AATH Lifetime Achievement award was presented to her in 2016. Her book, "Using Humor to Maximize Living" is the text for numerous college courses. Her latest book, "Legacy of Laughter: A Grandparent Guide and Playbook" will be published in 2020. Additional information can be found on her website. <https://www.questforhumor.com/>



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