

Responding to Color as We Age

Program Objectives

- We'll address the idea of choosing color to satisfy our physical, emotional, and nutritional needs as we age.
- This program will help us to understand how color can affect us when planning our surrounding to meet our needs.
- This program will help us to see that color affects what we appear to see, our emotions, and even our safety.

The way we perceive color changes as we age...

- 2-6 years of age - Increase in accuracy discriminating color
- 15 years of age – Youth can discriminate colors as accurately as adults
- 20-30 years of age – Peak discrimination occurs for adults
- Age 65 – vision of colors less accurate and glare sensitivity increases

Scores on color matching tests show a 70% decline by age 60 years of age and an additional 56% change in color matching ability by age 80.

Older adults tend to see bright, deep colors as lighter colors. They are able to see yellow, orange and red more easily than darker colors.

A mixture of bright primary colors and pastels can provide contrast for those having difficulty distinguishing color.

Safety and Color:

Color contrast can be used to...

- Indicate changes in ground level – use brightly colored tape or paint
- Judging distance between steps – paint the steps in bold colors
- Prevent cross contamination by using color coded cutting boards and knives in the kitchen
- In poor lighting, color coding can assist in finding the correct key quickly.

Safety and Medicine:

Warning labels are being improved to better protect patient health.

- Icons or pictures are being added so that labels are easy to understand.
- Different colors are being used for each warning label. This helps the text stand out to the patient. Red labels are meant for direct warnings, yellow or orange for caution, and blue are meant for advise.

Color in the workplace:

Some interesting studies relating to color

- A room covered in red light seems to make a person overestimate time. However, for a room colored in green or light blue light, people underestimated time.
- In another study, workers lifting black boxes complained of the weight being too heavy; but when boxes were painted green, they seemed to feel lighter.
- In the dark Middle Ages, Blackfriars Bridge in London, a gloomy black structure, was noted to have recorded a record number of suicides until the bridge was painted bright green.

Color preferences as we age:

For the most part, children enjoy primary colors over pastels. Bright red, orange, pink and yellow are often reported as favorite colors. However, as adults mature, they tend to favor soft blue and green and often move away from colors like red, orange, or yellow.

Later in life, our color preferences often change again. Bright colors are preferred over pastels. This could relate to physical changes in the eye.

Color in your home:

Emotions are commonly associated with various paint colors.

- Red and orange are associated with excitement, stimulation, and aggression.
- Blue and green are associated with calm, security, and peace.
- Yellow is associated with cheer and joyfulness.
- Purple is associated with dignity and sadness.
- Black, gray and brown are associated with strength, sadness, and depression.
- White is associated with safety, sterility, goodness and purity.

In conclusion, things to keep in mind

- To prevent falls, use colored tape or paint to add contrast to steps and to indicate change in ground level. Using colored tape can help to identify areas of concern and help you see better.
- For medication safety, be aware of colored labels on prescriptions to help identify instructions for taking medication.
- In your household, choose colors that help you to relax or feel energized depending on your mood.
- During mealtime, choose to fill your plate as *MyPlate.gov* suggests to help maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Resources:

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