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Gray Hair

When was the first time you saw a gray hair? Not just any gray hair; your gray hair, your first gray hair?

It seems that people can be categorized as one of two types: those for whom a gray hair is just a gray hair, perhaps part of a process, a milestone along the journey of life.

For others, it is an ominous sign: a sign that something bad has happened, a source of unhappiness. These individuals may pull out the offending gray hair so as to deny its existence and the reminder of the biology of aging: that tell-tale sign that we are not as young as we used to be. It's as though, if we do not see it, it does not exist; the personal and visual equivalent of the existential question "If a tree falls in the forest and no one hears it...?"

We all value many things "that get better with age": cheese, wine, coins, stamps, art and furniture. Why is that some people are troubled by their own aging? Why are we not able to think of ourselves in the same way we think of a good Bordeaux or camembert: We are getting better and more distinctive with unique and special qualities as we age?

Certainly there are benefits related to the aging process—even before Medicare or Golden Age discounts on airplanes and at the movies kick in.

When "things" do not go as I had wished, I am not as bitterly disappointed. After all, I know from experience that "these things happen." When events do not progress as fast as I would have liked, I am less discontent. These "things" have happened before; it is not surprising that they are happening again.

Yes indeed, there is nothing like experience. Stay calm. None of these things are really unexpected any longer. "It" is all just part of life. Maybe even enriching, an experience I will look back on and savor.

Wait a minute! Is that another gray hair?

Stanley J. Goldsmith, MD
Editor-in-Chief, The Journal of Nuclear Medicine
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