

# HEALTHY WORKPLACES FOR ALL AGES

Information sheets will:

Outline the situation in Ireland

Discuss what happens to us as we age

What can be done to ensure we remain healthy throughout our working life

For more Information visit ;

<https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/benefits-services/health-and-safety/>

[www.healthy-workplaces.eu/en](http://www.healthy-workplaces.eu/en)

*Ensuring healthy ageing at work means that workers live well, work well and age well.*



## OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH —AGING IN THE WORFORCE—

### A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE:

The definition of 45 or 50 years of age is used as the base criterion for aging worker. Studies show that, past this age there are low participation rates of workers in the workplace particularly in those aged 55 years and older. It can also be shown that there is an early exit of this group from work-life all over the world. The workforce of the EU will reach its oldest age in the next ten years, meaning that there will be more potential aging workers in the work force than ever before and fewer younger workers than ever before. As a result the age dependency ratios will increase greatly during the next 15-25 years.

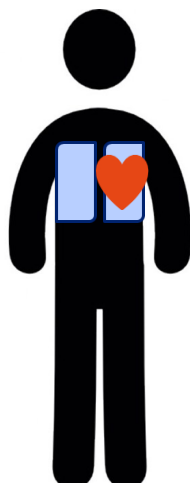
By 2026 in Europe, workers aged greater than 50 will comprise the largest proportion of workforce at the >30%. This is a group that have specific occupational health and environmental needs. Older workers do have decreased physical capabilities and lower health status but tend to be more experienced and have greater expertise at work. Older workers have been shown to be more motivated and generally have a more positive attitude. Clearly it is important to identify the needs of older workers in order to facilitate them remaining in our workforce for as long as they wish.

### The Physical Picture –What happens to us as we age?

In this section we will give you an overview of what happens to our bodies as we age. You can play an important role in your own health and encourage you to keep yourself optimally fit and healthy.

#### Cardiovascular and respiratory systems:

Your 'aerobic power' decreases by 10% per decade (reduced cardiac output, decreased maximum breathing capacity and maximum oxygen uptake during physical exertion).

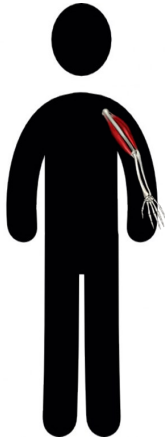


At work, particularly relevant for jobs with heavy physical work. Older workers may be working nearer to their own maximal levels resulting in fatigue

#### How to address?

Equipment to reduce heavy physical workload, frequent short breaks, self-pacing of work sufficient time for recovery and regular health checks.

## Musculoskeletal System:

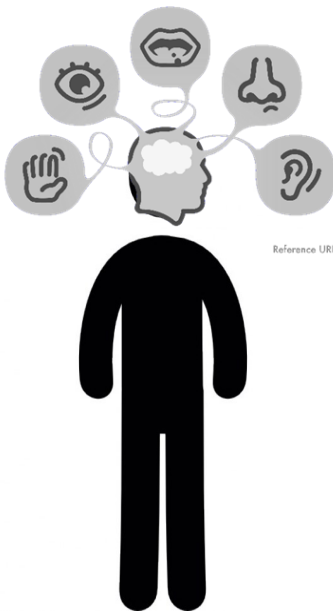


Muscle strength and endurance decreases around 20-40% between the ages of 20 and 60 years. At work, jobs that require people to use a wide range of movements and where manual handling is involved may increase the risk of injury in older workers, as older workers may be working nearer to their own maximal levels and there may be increased risk of bone fractures.

### How to address?

- Identify where groups or individuals are having difficulties
- Avoid repetitive work by incorporating job rotation and allow regular (short) breaks
- Avoid fixed postures
- Design work to allow movement and postural change. Also, avoid prolonged bending and other extreme demands
- Provide tools that are designed to fit the task and user

## Sensory System:



Changes in balance control; at work, there may be a higher risk of falling, slipping and tripping. There may be implications for rescue personnel.

### How to address?

- Ensure proper lighting of all walkways,
- Clean up spills immediately, keeping floors in good condition and use absorbent materials to avoid slipping
- Use high contrast colours on stairs and uneven areas
- Match work with abilities
- Ensure that guidelines and safety measures for work at height are known and followed
- Provide shoes/boots with non-slip soles based on risk assessment

## Aging can change your physical abilities:

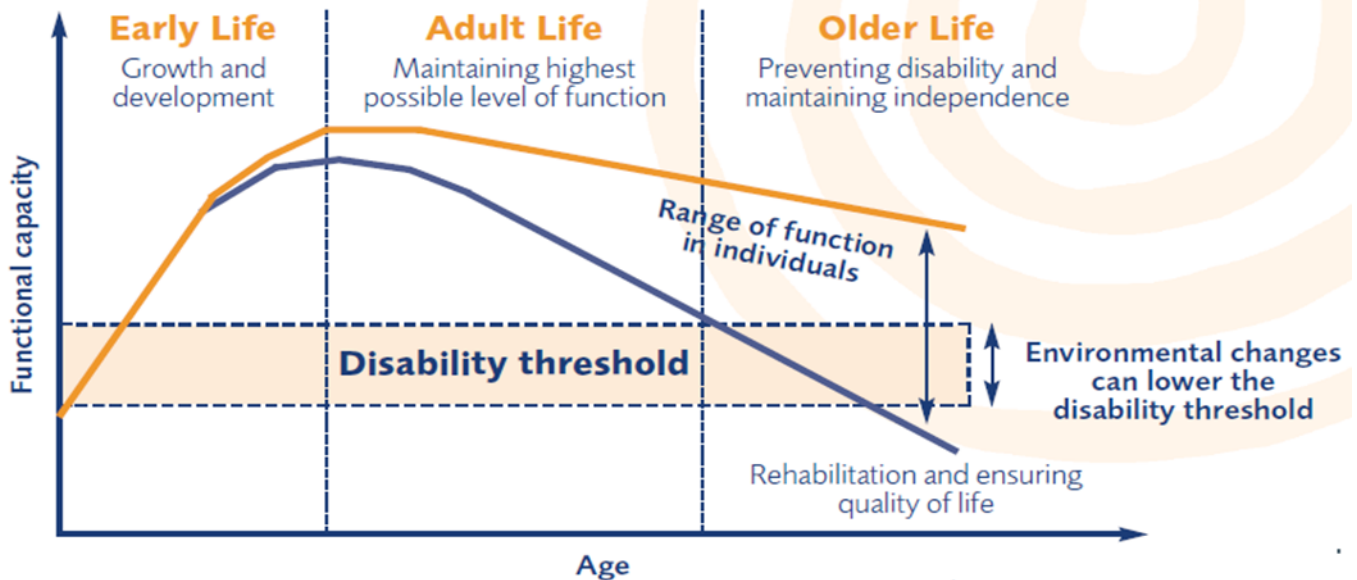
The age-related changes in functional capacity are not uniform because of individual differences in lifestyle, nutrition, fitness, genetic predisposition to illness, educational level, and work and other environments. Ageing in itself is not the determining factor for a decline in capacity, but it interacts with all these factors that together affect functional capacity. The changes in functional capacity occur in relation to individuals rather than in relation to age groups, which means that there are considerable inter-individual differences, which increase with age.

This is well illustrated by Figure 4 below which has been developed as the conceptual framework of the WHO Programme on Ageing and Health. The two diverging lines in the graphic, which show how widely physical capacity can theoretically vary over the lifespan across the population, suggest that rate of decline of functional capacities depends, among others, on lifestyle and environmental factors. Your interventions can make a significant difference to your physical and mental well being.



# Functional capacity and the life course

## A life course perspective for maintenance of the highest possible level of functional capacity



### Three Step Approach:

In order to address the issue outlined above, occupational and environmental experts have adopted a three pronged approach.

1. The first approach centres around further research and education to better understand what happens to our physical and mental health as we age. This should be examined not just at an individual level but also at a societal and organisational level. Maximising workability and employability for older workers is in everyone's interest and should be addressed at the highest levels.
2. Secondly, at a more individual level, adjustment of work demands in accordance with functional capacities of the individual are needed for all workers but particularly those engaged in moderate to heavy physically demanding duties.
3. Thirdly all employers and fellow workers should be educated on the strengths of the ageing worker and the capacity of these workers to contribute because of their experience motivation and skills.

Strategies that can help, include training of supervisors for age management and the implementation of on-site age ergonomics. The provision of worksite exercise programmes and training in new technology can optimise physical health and assist in transitioning older workers into new positions that may not be as physically demanding.

***In summary, what you do now will influence who you are in the future, so plan your retirement, stay active, eat healthily and don't wait until your retirement to enjoy life.***