

I Can't Believe I am the Same Age as Old People

A BLOG ON AGING WELL

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I have a T-shirt that I regularly wear to the gym. On the back of the T-shirt is the phrase “I can’t believe I am the same age as old people.” It is one of those lines that makes you laugh first and think later. It’s funny because it’s true, and it’s true because age sneaks up on all of us. One day, you’re young, vibrant, and convinced that “old people” are a separate species who travel in packs at grocery stores and complain about the price of produce and the number of doctors’ visits they must endure. Then suddenly you catch your reflection in a store window and think, “Who is that old guy?” only to realize — with horror — that it’s you.

This phrase captures a universal human experience: the moment when your internal age and your external age stop matching. Inside, you might still feel 25, or 32, or whatever age you were when you felt most like yourself. But the calendar insists on telling a different story. The calendar, unlike your knees, never lies.

Humor aside, this moment of realization is more than a punchline. It’s a psychological crossroads, a place where identity, culture, and mental health intersect in surprising ways.

The Inner Child vs the Inner Adult

Most people carry around an internal age that doesn’t change much over time. Psychologists sometimes call this the “subjective age,” and it’s often younger than our actual age. This is why a 75-year-old can still feel like a teenager when their favorite song from high school comes on, or why a 45-year-old can still feel personally attacked when someone calls them “sir” or “ma’am.”

So when someone says, “I can’t believe I am the same age as old people,” what they really mean is: “My body is aging, but my inner self refuses to cooperate.”

This disconnect can be funny, but it can also be disorienting. It forces us to confront the fact that aging is not just a physical process — it’s a psychological one.

Society Doesn’t Help

Part of the problem is that society treats aging like a contagious disease. Anti-aging creams, hair dyes, gym memberships, collagen powders, and “miracle supplements” all promise to keep us young. Meanwhile, birthday cards mock aging with jokes about dentures and memory loss. It’s no wonder people feel shocked when they realize they’ve crossed into the demographic they once pitied.

And let's be honest: society's definition of "old" is inconsistent at best. When you're 10, 30 seems ancient. When you're 30, 50 seems old. When you're 50, 70 seems old. And when you're 70, you look at 90-year-olds and think, "Now that's old." Aging is a moving target, and the target keeps moving away from us.

The Mental Health Side of Aging

Humor aside, aging does have real effects on mental health — both positive and negative.

On the positive side, many people experience:

- Greater emotional stability
- Better coping skills
- More resilience
- A stronger sense of identity
- Less concern about what others think

In other words, aging can make you wiser, calmer, and more confident. You may not run as fast as you used to, but you also don't run from your problems anymore.

But aging can also bring challenges:

- Anxiety about health
- Sadness or grief over lost youth
- Fear of irrelevance
- Loneliness or social changes
- Stress about caregiving or family roles

The phrase "I can't believe I am the same age as old people" often reflects this emotional tension. It's a humorous way of acknowledging a deeper truth: aging forces us to renegotiate our identity.

The Shock of Realization

Certain moments in life trigger this phrase:

- When you hear a song from your youth on the "oldies" collection on Apple Music
- When your doctor starts sentences with "At your age..."
- When you bend down to pick something up and make a noise, you didn't authorize
- When you realize your childhood was 30, 40, or 50+ years ago
- When you meet a coworker who was born after you graduated from high school
- When you see a celebrity you grew up with and think, "Wow, they got old," before realizing you aged at the same rate

These moments are funny, but they also create a kind of existential whiplash. You're forced to reconcile the person you feel like with the person the world sees.

Aging and Identity

Identity is not fixed; it evolves. But aging can make that evolution feel more dramatic. You may find yourself asking:

- Who am I now?
- What do I want from this stage of life?
- How do I stay connected to others?
- What gives my life meaning now?

These questions are not signs of crisis — they're signs of growth. Aging invites us to reflect, reassess, and reimagine.

The Gift Hidden in this Joke

The beauty of the phrase “I can't believe I am the same age as old people” is that it acknowledges the absurdity of aging while also celebrating the resilience of the human spirit. It says:

- I'm still here.
- I'm still me.
- I'm still growing.
- And I still have a sense of humor about it.

Humor becomes a coping mechanism, a way to soften the edges of reality. It helps us accept what we cannot change and appreciate what we still have.

Aging Is NOT the Enemy

The truth is, aging is not something that happens to us — it's something we do. It's an accomplishment. It means we've lived, learned, survived, and kept going. The “old people” we once saw from a distance were simply older versions of ourselves.

And now we're joining them — not as strangers, but as peers. I was blessed with wonderful mentors in my younger years. I can remember being with them as they entered their senior years. To a person, they all commented on how fast life had passed. They each had a wonderful story to tell, and they were determined to continue that story with hope and purpose.

The phrase “I can't believe I am the same age as old people” is funny because it captures a moment of self-recognition that is both shocking and deeply human. It reflects the gap between our inner youth and our outer age, the cultural confusion around aging, and the emotional complexity of growing older. It also reminds us that aging is not just a physical process but a psychological journey — one filled with humor, humility, and unexpected wisdom.

In the end, maybe the real message is this:

We never stop being ourselves, no matter how old we get. We simply become more layered, more interesting, and — if we're lucky — more willing to laugh at the whole ridiculous, beautiful process.

About the Author



Phil is a registered mental health counselor intern. Before his career as a mental health counselor, he spent 40+ years working in higher education, having served as a college president, vice president, and professor. He graduated from Bellevue University with an MS in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. Phil focuses on relationship issues, life transitions, and the disorders that prevent mental and physical wellness, such as depression, anxiety, crisis, and traumatic events. He earned his Doctor of Education degree in leadership from Nova Southeastern University. He serves as a leadership and career coach to individuals in North America, Europe, and Australia. His counseling approach is an integrated approach with a strong focus on Choice Theory and Reality Therapy. Phil is originally from Boston, Massachusetts. He enjoys jiu jitsu and weightlifting in his spare time and has an active social media presence discussing living a positive, purpose-driven life.

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