

Diarrhoea
and **constipation**
in **geriatric practice**

This textbook provides a practical and comprehensive account of the management of diarrhoea and constipation in the elderly. These common disorders in the elderly are not only a burden in themselves but are often manifestations of a more serious underlying illness: thus, effective diagnosis and treatment are essential to improve quality of life.

Many important conditions are associated with diarrhoea. The text includes updates on pathogenesis, diagnosis and treatment, and highlights the vulnerability of the elderly with regard to acquiring diarrhoea and its complications.

The aetiology of diarrhoea is explained, including infections of the gastrointestinal tract, and systemic diseases of which diarrhoea is a manifestation. Diverse disciplines are spanned: from immunology and physiology to microbiology, nutrition and psychiatry.

The aetiology, diagnosis and treatment of constipation are dealt with, emphasizing practical management issues.

The book is aimed at geriatricians, general practitioners and allied health workers.

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Edited by Ranjit N. Ratnaike
Frontmatter
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Diarrhoea and **constipation** in **geriatric practice**

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For
Stephanie Kathleen

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Preface

Diarrhoea and Constipation in Geriatric Practice is a text primarily for geriatricians and other health professionals, such as general practitioners, who are involved in the care of the elderly. The elderly comprise a significant and increasing segment of the population in both the industrialized and the developing countries. The problem of diarrhoea and constipation in this aging population is likely to attract increasing attention. The extent of these problems and their social and physical implications are perhaps not sufficiently recognized. The common problem of constipation in the elderly is discussed, with emphasis on practical management issues.

The text covers the important conditions associated with diarrhoea and updates the information on pathogenesis, diagnosis and treatment. The vulnerability of the elderly with regard to acquiring diarrhoea and to the complications is also highlighted.

There is a greater emphasis on diarrhoea in the text. This is because the aetiology is extensive, encompassing many infections of the gastrointestinal tract (which are relevant in the developing world) and includes systemic diseases of which diarrhoea is a manifestation. Diverse disciplines are spanned: from immunology and physiology to microbiology, nutrition and psychiatry.

The separate chapter on coeliac disease is to highlight the importance of this condition. The diagnosis may sometimes not be considered in the elderly.

The aim of this book is to provide information to help understand the many facets of diarrhoea and to assist in the prevention, diagnosis and management of diarrhoea in the elderly.

Increasingly, the emphasis is on the care of the elderly person in the community rather than in an institution, and the role of the nurse practitioner is of great importance. Chapter 19 addresses a variety of issues which would be useful to nurses involved in the care of the elderly.

It is hoped that this text will provide comprehensive information to manage successfully the common problems of diarrhoea and constipation in the elderly with a view to improving quality of life.

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Foreword

Older persons are of increasing importance in almost every arena of medical practice. In developed countries people aged 65 years and over constitute 12 to 18 per cent of the general population but account for around 30 to 40 per cent of the consumption of health care services. The global increase in total numbers of older persons is astonishing; by the year 2025 there will be more than 800 million people aged 65 years and over in the world, two thirds of them in developing countries.

The older person has a fundamental right to expect and receive high quality medical care including, where appropriate, the application of the most recent technological advances available.

There is a pressing need for more detailed texts that deal comprehensively, and in depth, with particular aspects of medicine in old age.

Medical practitioners in almost all situations encounter a growing proportion of older persons in daily practice, often presenting differently from the standard textbook description of disease and frequently with multiple and complex disorders. Improved information on disease in old age, and education and training in the practice of best medicine in providing care for the older person, is critical at every level.

This book, written by a group of highly skilled and informed practitioners, covers an important and sometimes neglected area of health in old age. Its publication during the 1999 International Year of Older Persons is remarkably timely. It reminds us of the need to deal not only with the rhetoric and broad pronouncements on the importance of individual and population aging, but also to focus on the most basic and practical issues associated with achieving good medical practice in old age. The topics covered in this book are relevant not only to specialist geriatricians but to all medical and health care providers who are involved with the care of older persons.

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