

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE

# Redefining the elderly as aged 75 years and older: Proposal from the Joint Committee of Japan Gerontological Society and the Japan Geriatrics Society

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In many countries, including Japan, the elderly are defined as having a chronological age of 65 years or older. However, there is no clear medical or biological evidence to support this definition. Recently, this definition of the elderly has come to not match the current situation in Japan, although there are individual differences in the elderly. Many of the elderly, especially aged those younger than 75 years, are still robust and active. Many people feel hesitant to treat them as elderly, and many of them feel uncomfortable being treated as elderly. Based on these reasons, in 2013, the Japan Gerontological Society and the Japan Geriatrics Society launched a joint committee to reconsider the definition of the elderly, and discussed the definition of the elderly from various aspects for 3 years. As a result of analyzing various data on the physical and psychological health of the elderly in recent years, a phenomenon of “rejuvenation” has been seen in which the appearance of changes in physical function as a result of aging, including gait speed and grip strength (Fig. 1), have been delayed by 5–10 years among the elderly at present compared with 10–20 years ago.<sup>1</sup> Even among those aged 65 years or older who have been regarded as elderly, especially the young-old aged 65–74 years, mental and physical health is well maintained, and the majority of them are capable of taking part in active

social activities. Furthermore, according to the results of various awareness surveys, the opinion against recognizing those aged 65 years or older as elderly is generally gaining strength in society as well (Fig. 2).<sup>2</sup> According to the survey carried out by the Cabinet Office of the Japanese Government, many people think that those aged over 70 or 75 years should be considered elderly.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, our joint committee would like to propose a classification of people aged over 65 years as follows.

Aged from 65 to 74 years: pre-old age

Aged over 75 years: old age

In addition, people aged over 90 years can be classified as oldest-old or super-old.

This definition mainly takes into consideration the aging situation of developed countries, but we believe that if the extension of life expectancy and “rejuvenation” phenomenon spreads globally, it is a concept that will be globally accepted.

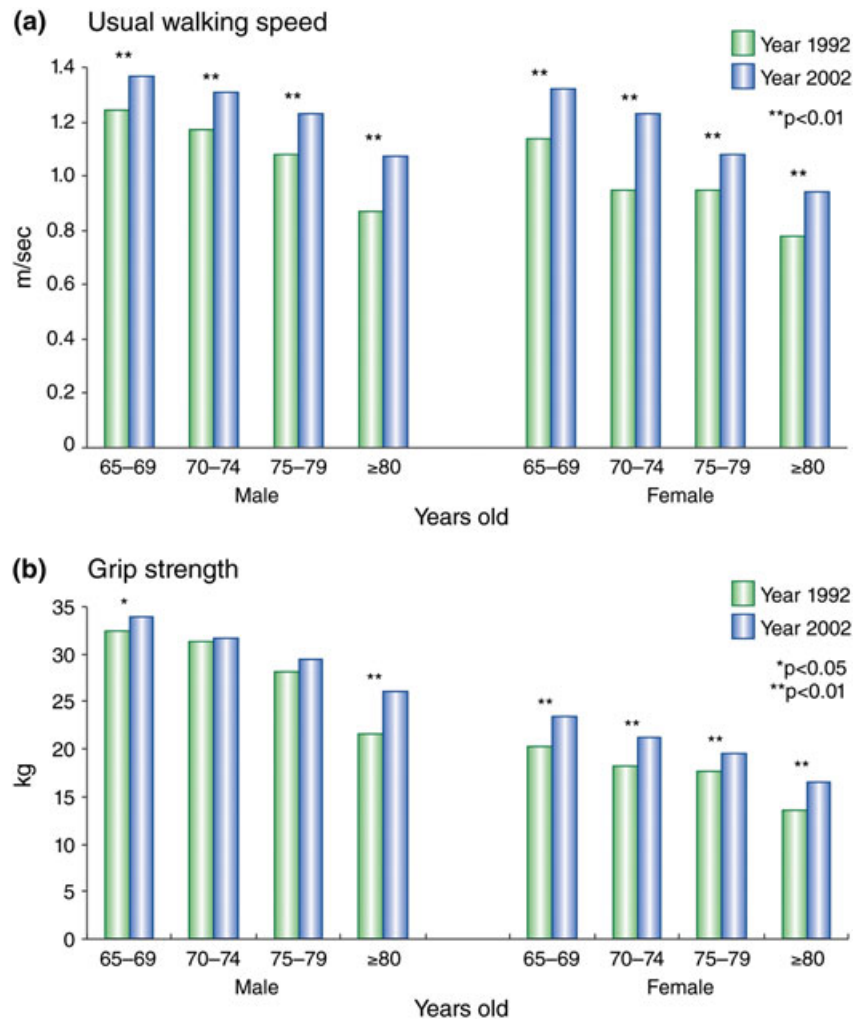
In contrast, with the global extension of life expectancy, it is appropriate to think of those aged over 90 years who have surpassed the average life expectancy as oldest-old/super-old according to the previous definition.

The significance of re-examining the definition and classification of the elderly is: (i) to consider the elderly according to the previous definition as motivated supporters of society once again; and (ii) to create an upcoming super-aged society with brightness and vitality. However, the trend towards improved physical ability in the elderly is not guaranteed to continue into the future, indicating the need to educate the next generation on the promotion of health once again. As for policy implication, our proposal might lead to the revision of social security

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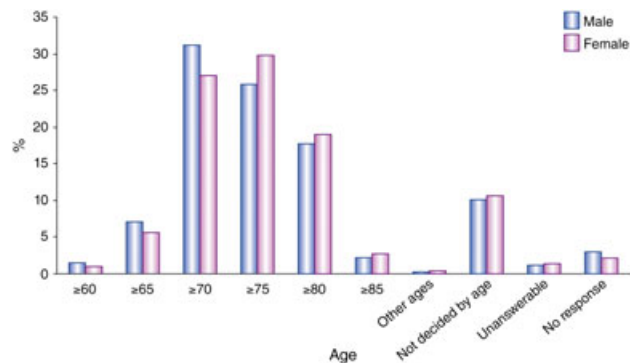
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**Figure 1** The improvement of (a) gait speed and (b) grip strength during the 10 years between 1992 and 2002 obtained in the cohort study carried out in Akita Prefecture, Japan, by The Tokyo Metropolitan Institute of Gerontology.

policy, because many pre-old people can contribute to productivity and reduce the socioeconomic burden of the younger generation. However, we would like to



**Figure 2** The results of the awareness survey regarding the age of the beginning of old age recognized by Japanese people carried out by the Cabinet Office of the Japanese Government in 2014. The beginning of old age is mostly recognized as 70 years by men and as 75 years by women.

emphasize that this proposal does not intend to provide a political basis for shrinking social welfare for pre-old and old people.

We hope that our proposal will contribute to the realization of our citizens' desire to construct a bright, productive, healthy and long-living society.

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## Appendices

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