

# SENIOR LIVING

## Exceptional Health in Old Age Study looks at factors that can help

Elderly people who have a positive outlook, lower stress levels, moderate alcohol consumption, abstain from tobacco, and have moderate to higher incomes with no chronic health conditions are more likely to thrive in their old age, according to a study in the October issue of the *Journals of Gerontology, Medical Sciences*.

Researchers from Portland State University, the Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research, Oregon Health & Science University, and Statistics Canada surveyed 2,432 older Canadians about their quality of life. The few who maintained excellent health over an entire decade were considered

"thrivers."

"Important predictors of 'thriving' were the absence of chronic illness, income over \$30,000, having never smoked, and drinking alcohol in moderation," said Mark Kaplan, lead author and PSU professor of community health. "We also found that people who had a positive outlook and lower stress levels were more likely to thrive in old age."

"Many of these factors can be modified when you are young or middle-aged," said David Feeny, co-author and senior investigator at the Kaiser health research center. "While these findings may seem like common sense, now we have evidence about which factors contribute



A positive outlook can lower stress and contribute to healthy old age.

to exceptional health during retirement years."

Study participants filled out an extensive health survey every other year, starting in 1994 and continuing through 2004. One measure, called the Health Utilities Index, asked people to rate their abilities in eight categories, including vision, hearing, speech, ambulation, dexterity, emotion, cognition, and pain.

"Thrivers" were those who rated themselves as having no or only mild disability in all eight categories on at least five of the six surveys.

If respondents reported moderate or severe disability on any of the six surveys, they were clas-

sified as "non-thrivers." Just over half of the respondents started out as "thrivers", but by the end of the 10 years, only 8 percent of the respondents were considered thrivers. At the end of the study period, 47 percent of the respondents were classified as non-thrivers. Thirty-six percent had died and 9 percent were institutionalized.

"Even though the study was conducted in Canada, the findings are certainly applicable to the United States and other industrialized nations," says Dr. Bentson McFarland, co-author and professor of psychiatry, public health and preventive medicine at OHSU.

## Medicare Change Letters Due

Medicare Advantage or Medicare Part D prescription drug coverage enrollees were scheduled to receive Annual Notice of Change letters last month describing any changes in coverage and costs for 2009.

Oregon Insurance Division officials say it's very important to read and save this letter. Some people will learn that the plan they have will no longer cover

one or more of their prescriptions or that the amount they pay for premiums or co-pays will change in 2009. Reading and understanding this information now will help avoid costly surprises later.

People with Medicare may change plans during an open enrollment period that begins Nov. 15 and goes through Dec. 31. Medicare suggests that people make any changes by early

December to experience a smooth transition.

Medicare recipients who have to find a new plan may want to call their current plan first to understand their choices. They may also call Oregon's Senior Health Insurance Benefits Assistance program (SHIBA) at 1-800-722-4134 for free and unbiased counseling and enrollment assistance.

## Home Repairs Bring Safety

Some local homeowners will soon get the help they need to live safely in their homes.

Volunteers from the REACH Community Builders Program are providing free home repairs for 20 elderly and disabled homeowners living in the neighborhoods of Arbor Lodge, Portsmouth, Cathedral Park, Kenton, Overlook,

St. Johns and University Park.

REACH is recruiting applicants, volunteers with trade skills, and seeking cash and material donations for special workdays.

With support from Metro, the Portland Bureau of Housing and Community Development, area businesses and local volunteers, REACH will help the homeowners

with clogged gutters, leaking faucets, rotting steps, minor electrical repairs, and improving accessibility in and around of their home.

To volunteer, donate or to request an application, call Barrett Ebright at 503-231-0682 extension 142 or visit the REACH website at [reachedc.org](http://reachedc.org).

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