

Be practical when selecting gifts for the elderly

Every season is sweater time for nursing home residents, who tend to feel chilly all year around. Even so, holiday and gift-giving occasions usually bring too much of a good thing. What would be welcome alternatives to the warm sweater or cozy shawl?

A survey conducted by a psychologist specializing in geriatrics revealed that family members lean toward expensive luxury gifts: a cashmere sweater, gold jewelry, a box of expensive chocolates.

But when nursing home residents were asked what presents they liked best, they listed, in the following order: visits, telephone calls, greeting cards with warm, personal messages, any drawing or object created by a grandchild.

Fortunately the survey revealed more tangible gifts that were also greatly enjoyed. Among these were:

* Warm-up suits in nice colors. Many residents have already adopted running shoes as com-

fortable, steady-footgear and like the sporty "ensemble" look of trim sweat suits. Check to be sure your own parent won't feel foolish in this casual garb, however.

* Costume jewelry. Necklaces and pendants on chains long enough to be slipped over the head are best. Earrings are also favorites. Pins aren't a good idea because clasps are hard to manage. Men like monogrammed belt buckles.

* Housecoats and wrappers. These should be good looking but sturdy because they'll have to withstand repeated hotwater washings.

* An afghan, particularly one nomade. Used as a bedspread, it adds another personal touch to limited living space and serves as a constant reminder of the giver's affection.

* A collection of ankle- and knee-length stretch-tube socks in white and basic colors. Socks may not sound like a glamorous gift but residents like them.

Higher-ticket items

* A color television set with earphones and automatic channel changer.

* A cassette recorder, if the person is able to handle it. An extra: specially recorded "memory" tapes. Even better, personal taped messages from family members that recall memorable, shared incidents. It's nice to be able to hear "I love you, you know" and "I think about you a lot" over and over. Book tapes are fine for people whose minds are hungry for stimulation but whose vision is impaired.

Think-twice presents

Gifts that seem appropriate but aren't used too much, according to nursing home staffers, include delicate blouses, sweaters, slacks and robes that require dry-cleaning.

Plants are supposed to give residents something to nurture, but residents have trouble keeping them thriving in dry, overheated and underventilated

nursing homes rooms. Also, they feel guilty if the plant dies. Dr. Buchner reminds that "a drooping, dying plant is a very depressing sight and is frequently symbolized as the deteriorating self." Cut flowers, on the other hand, are colorful additions. Their eventual passing is expected and tolerated as a natural event.

Fancy candies, cookies, nuts and cheeses are not the logical choices they may seem to be. Even if they don't violate dietary restrictions, they encourage weight gain which isn't desirable for sedentary snackers. Cheese may interact unfavorably with certain medications. Small packages of dried fruit are safe bets.

Sometimes we send or take a gift that is more for us than for them: Expensive jewelry fits into this category. We hate to give costume jewelry to a person who, we feel, deserves "only the best." But valuable jewelry is likely to be a source of constant anxiety, and ends up wrapped in tissue at the bottom of the ever-present pocketbook.

"The elderly have a deeply entrenched security anxiety because they lose, hide and forget things, or have things spirited away by mysterious forces," the psychologist finds. A missing hairbrush or fine jewelry takes on the dimensions of tragedy. The solution? Handsome costume jewelry makes a resident

feel fashionable and is more likely to be worn and enjoyed.

Gift of Laughter

A present that makes the receiver laugh is tops, nursing home staff members agree. Even if the person only wears or uses it once, the amusement provided by the unexpected gift brings a smile every time he or she thinks about it.

One 86-year-old lady's favorite Christmas present was a pair of gigantic "bear-feet" bedroom slippers that were particularly funny peeping from an elegant robe. Every time she looked down at her "paws," she'd emit other roar of laughter.

Elderly require additional water

Even though a glass of water is the beverage least likely to be served the elderly, it is the one most needed by aging bodies.

The level of water stored in the body declines as we get older. If we don't drink enough water to make up for this natural loss, kidney function and the ability to regulate temperature and tolerate heat will be impaired.

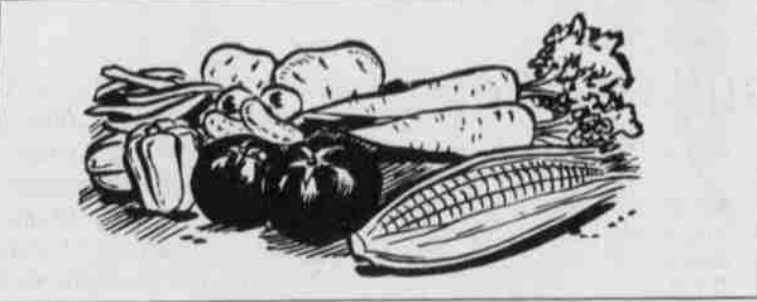
It isn't enough simply to increase the amount of fluid we drink. There is no substitute for water itself. Even drinks with high water content such as coffee, tea or soda can actually retard water absorption. A report in Continuing Education Update (CEU) has these recommendations for serving beverages to the elderly:

* Dilute fresh fruit juices and sweet soda with water. The stomach needs time to process the sugar in these drinks, and the flow of water into the rest of the body is therefore delayed.

* Offer iced, unsugared herbal tea instead of regular tea or cola drinks, which contain caffeine, theobromine and theophylline. These ingredients actually step up water excretion.

* Limit coffee intake. * Save alcohol for very special occasions and then only if the drinker isn't on medications. Alcohol causes kidneys to excrete more water.

Older people should drink a minimum of three glasses of water a day and four during hot weather. If plain water is rejected, add a bit of mint, lemon peel or lime to party it up.



Men are subject to osteoporosis, too

Women, particularly menopausal ones, are prime candidates for osteoporosis. The disease strikes older men as well.

The rising incidence of hip fractures among the elderly is a sign that osteoporosis is at work. But the rate of hip breakage in men starts to increase about 10 years later than in women. So, physicians have been less likely to look for osteoporosis symp-

toms in aging males, although the outcomes are just as serious for men as they are for women.

In women, the disease is linked to the drop in estrogen production that accompanies menopause. Obviously men do not share this problem, so specialists theorize that osteoporosis has other causes as well. "Besides the hormonal (cause), it's nutritional, it's genetic and it's

environmental," says Dr. Richard Rivlin, professor of medicine and chief of the nutrition division at New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center.

Contributing factors include excessive alcohol consumption, poor eating habits, lack of exercise, the use of certain medications such as Dilantin and Cortisone, and the overuse of laxatives and diuretics.

In men, testicular failure may play a role similar to that of menopause in women, since the depletion of sex hormones seems to increase vulnerability to osteoporosis.

Calcium's role in the disease is still unclear. Doctors agree that men, as well as women, need 1,000 mgs of calcium every day as a safeguard. Doctor-approved exercise, like walking, helps strengthen bones.

Reflecting on past sometimes soothing

Sitting quietly in a chair or lying in bed with eyes closed is not always a sign of boredom.

The elderly have great pride in their years of working and raising their families. Remembering these accomplishments is an enjoyable way of filling their days. When they have no audience to listen, elderly people can enjoy remembering just as well by themselves. And at times even when they have visitors, their preference may be to be quiet and remember. If Mom or Dad doesn't seem to be listening, it might well be they are

listening, it might well be that there is a more important conversation going on in his or her mind at that moment.

Many times, an exuberant visitor or an enthusiastic activity coordinator can initiate involvement from a shy or withdrawn elderly person. But, then again, the pressures from caring relatives may be a daily source of frustration to the older person who has lived a full and active life and now looks forward to "just sitting and remembering" or "doing nothing" each day.

Family responsibilities cause stress, tension

Adults responsible for aging parents and teenage children often feel caught in the middle when trying to respond to both the young and old. Feeling stress from these responsibilities is a problem many adults must cope with.

Some adult children stay home longer than usual because of unemployment, divorce, college or university attendance, or health problems. Others set up their own homes, but still need parental support for babysitting, transportation and other services.

Aging parents, on the other

hand, may be unable to care for themselves or may need help only occasionally.

Adults who are caught between the generations feel depressed, guilty or even angry. Often they lack financial and emotional resources to do as much as they might want to for their children and parents.

This new responsibility means the caught-in-the-middle adults need support and help from family and friends. Shared responsibilities and reasonable expectations can help these persons cope with situations that could otherwise be physically, men-

tally or economically damaging. Here is some advice that might help.

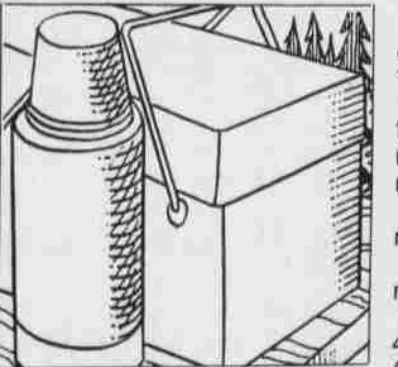
* Arrange for some private time for yourself with no specific tasks to do.

* Explain what you can and cannot do for other family members.

* Spend some time alone with your spouse if you are married.

* Remember that everyone needs family love and appreciation.

How to avoid food poisoning



* Keep all raw foods refrigerated or on ice until you're ready to use them.

* Thaw meat in the refrigerator overnight—or defrost in a microwave oven. Do not thaw at room temperature.

* Cook all foods thoroughly and refrigerate promptly.

* Don't leave hot foods out for more than two hours.

* Keep cold foods cold (below 45 degrees) and hot foods hot (over 140 degrees). The potential for food poisoning increases when food is kept between these temperatures. Transport and serve cold foods on ice to assure coldness. Eat hot foods immediately. Leftovers should be refrigerated as soon as the meal is over.

* Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before handling foods and each time after you handle raw meat or poultry. If you have a cut or sore, keep the wound covered with a bandage, or let someone else cook.

* To avoid cross-contamination, keep the number of people handling raw meat to a minimum.

* Use an acrylic cutting board that can be sterilized in a dishwasher.

* Wash sponges and dish rags frequently.

* Scrub all surfaces and utensils used to prepare raw foods with a disinfectant which con-

tains chlorine, then rinse.

* Never use the same platter that is used to carry raw meat to the grill for the cooked meat. Utensils used for preparing raw meat should not be used in serving cooked meat.

For more information about handling meat and poultry safely, call the United States Department of Agriculture at 1-800-535-4555.

Good exercise habits begin at young age

How can we teach children good exercise habits? Many experts believe that attitudes about exercise develop early, and that people who learn to enjoy exercise as youngsters are likely to make it a lifetime habit.

Guidelines for Childhood Exercise

1. Family life, not classes, is the strongest influence on a child's exercise habits. Parents should set a good example by pursuing activities with their children. It's never too early—or too late—to start exercising with your kids.

2. Exercise should be fun; if it's not, the child will soon abandon it. The adage "no pain, no

gain," is even more dangerous for kids than for adults.

3. Avoid "Little League Syndrome"—a strong emphasis on winning that can create undue tension and anxiety in youngsters. Don't push them beyond their physical and emotional limits and don't impose adult standards on them. Try to make children feel worthy whether they win or lose. If they feel like athletic failures at age six they may be turned off to exercise for life.

4. Teach a child to compete against herself, not others. Emphasize improvement as a reward in itself.

5. It is important to stimulate an early interest in aerobic activities, which are likely to become lifelong habits. Running in mod-

addiction is a problem of imbalance or unease within the body or mind. It's the result of losing touch with ourselves always reaching outside for stimulation and satisfaction because we no longer find gratification within.

The softer addiction, like workaholicism and procrastination, stem from the same inner turmoil as addiction to cigarettes, alcohol or drugs. The only difference is that you can get by with the softer addictions longer. They don't break down the body as fast. But the pain and suffering is there with soft addictions, and most of them lead to health problems.

Small says that addiction is becoming so attached to something that we forget who we are. It's obsessive and non-loving—a way of staying stuck in the past. The person who is addicted

postpones taking any action. You know you want to do something, else with your life, but you say, "Tomorrow I'll be ready. Tomorrow I'll be stronger." But tomorrow never comes.

Overcoming any compulsion is a process of self-discovery. Small says we all have a healthy side and an unbalanced side. To avoid or overcome addiction we need to get in touch with the healthy side—that inner voice that helps us accept ourselves and avoid destructive tendencies.

Facing up to your feelings, the ones that color everything you do, think and see, can be frightening and painful. But the result can be a rewarding revelation and the beginning of a fuller, happier life without addiction.

a weightlifting program, make sure he works with a trained supervisor who allows only slow lifts.

8. Any child who wants to engage in a strenuous after-school exercise program should have a physical exam.

