

Health Notes

Those in retirement can benefit from planning and activities

The retirement years can be a blessing or a curse, depending on how the new 'free' time is approached and what a person chooses to do with the time on their hands. Staying home watching the television probably won't enhance the retirement experience. Here are some suggestions that may help when planning for great 'golden' years.

"In some ways, I felt a bit lost when it was over," says Frank, about his retirement from a 40-year teaching career. "I was happy and energetic, but I felt strange in those first few weeks as I thought about what to do with all the time I had to myself." Frank's wife Joan sympathized with him. A former nurse, she had a similar feeling about retirement when it began for her two years before. "We're both active people. But that didn't make it easy to adjust to the change. I know some people who seemed to sail into retirement, but for me it wasn't so easy. I kept myself busy, but I was also thinking, 'Now what should I really be doing?'"

Older Americans who maintain an active schedule of engagement help keep themselves mentally and physically fit. Those who start new careers, such as opening a business or working part-time, can also help themselves financially. Volunteering with local organizations and pursuing other group activities can help seniors keep and expand their social connections.

Many seniors choose to keep working. In addition to the personal rewards that employment can bring, older workers contribute substantially to the nation's economy. The retirement contribution from baby boomers will become increasingly important to our national productivity because the size of that generation is not matched by the generations that follow.

Many studies have documented correlations between volunteering and positive aging among older adults. While volunteering makes you feel good, it can also improve your health because it

helps you make new contacts, develop new friendships, and feel connected to the greater community.

Another way to stay active is through personal development. Some older Americans choose to travel and see places they never had the time or resources to visit when they were younger. Others turn to school, taking courses at the local college or through community recreation centers in subjects that pique their interest. By learning new things and seeing new places, seniors can expand their horizons, stay sharp, and help to ensure their mental fitness for years to come.

Perhaps most important for a long and productive life, seniors have the opportunity to devote more care and time to their diets and exercise programs. Paying attention to how much and what they eat, and going for a walk every day is a good way to start. Beyond this, seniors can join gyms, health clubs, or take exercise classes through their local recreation centers.

Lucille, age 78, lifts weights and has "rock-hard" biceps. Chris, age 70, lost 20 pounds and is more active than he has ever been. These Americans are enjoying their older years by staying healthy, active, and productive.

Regardless of which activities seniors choose to pursue, staying active and involved in their own lives and in their communities will improve the quality of both. With many golden years to look forward to, the hardest part might just be choosing what to do first. As the Nation celebrates Older Americans Month in May, you can learn more about active engagement and other topics by visiting <www.aoa.gov>. The theme of Older Americans Month—"Celebrate Long-Term Living!"—highlights the goal of organizations throughout the Aging Network to help older Americans stay healthy and active longer. For information about local resources, contact the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116, or visit <www.eldercare.gov>.

Vegetables can aid in weight loss

Revising your eating habits to lose weight starts with one simple practice: Just veg out. That is, make sure your vegetable consumption is never out of the picture.

"Vegetables are nutritional 'powerhouses,'" said Louise Green, a representative of TOPS (Take Off Pounds Sensibly). "They're nutrient-dense, which means they provide a lot of nutrition relative to their calorie count. Green gives these tips for easily incorporating vegetables into your daily intake.

- Use vegetables as garnishes. Beside carrot curls and radish roses, try spears of lightly cooked asparagus, fresh sprigs of colorful purple kale, or paper-thin tomato crescents.

- Add crunch: Shredded jicama, chopped celery or diced bell peppers will enliven the

texture of a salad or casserole.

- Think "shapes." Green or red peppers can be cut into strips, rings or triangles. Diagonally slice broccoli stems and carrots. Make julienne strips of raw squash or cucumber.

- To pasta dishes, add steamed and sliced zucchini, carrots, bell peppers or broccoli.

TOPS members often learn tips like these during programs held at their weekly chapter meetings. To find out more about TOPS in our area, call Louise Green at 503-755-2328 or Pat Wheeler at 503-429-1584. TOPS meets each Monday evening at 6:00 p.m. at the Mist-Birkenfeld Fire Dept. 12525 Hwy. 202, Mist. Come and join us any Monday evening. You may call TOPS toll free at 1-800-932-8677. Visit the TOPS Web site at <www.top.s.org>.

NW Natural gives ideas to save gas

Gas customers have a new tool to help them control their home energy bills. The Home Energy Analyzer, located on NW Natural's website, provides gas customers with ideas to save energy and money. News about incentives that can reduce the cost of energy-saving measures are just a click away at the newly redesigned NW Natural website.

"In the past this type of analysis was not available to homeowners," said Kim Heiting, Director of Communications for NW Natural, "but now it's easier to make good decisions about weatherization measures or new equipment." Gas customers can go to the "Your Home" section of www.nwnatural.com for customized solutions for lowering household energy bills.

The Home Energy Analyzer helps customers find ways to lower energy bills and make the home more comfortable. Energy Trust provides cash incentives to offset some of the cost of energy-efficient measures such as high efficiency gas furnaces, insulation, high efficiency windows, duct sealing and more.

It takes about 30 minutes to complete the online analysis. Homeowners can use either their account number from their gas bills or the regional averages based on the homeowner's ZIP code. The Home Ener-

gy Analyzer can access utility customer records, ensuring that the recommendations for measures and projections of energy savings are accurate. The analysis for each home can be saved by registering your email address at the website. The information is secure and completely confidential. If a homeowner wants more information on energy saving ideas, they can request it through the website or link to web pages.

"Many homeowners don't realize how much money they can save at a relatively low cost — especially with Energy Trust incentives," said Diane Ferington, manager, residential programs, Energy Trust of Oregon.

Cash incentives of up to \$200 are available for wall, floor and ceiling insulation, duct sealing and air sealing. For more information about incentives, visit <www.energytrust.org/residential/hes> or call 1-866-ENTRUST (368-7878) to talk with an Energy Trust representative.

Energy Trust of Oregon, Inc., is a nonprofit organization promoting energy efficiency and clean renewable energy for Oregon customers of Pacific Power, Portland General Electric and NW Natural. For more information, visit the Energy Trust website, www.energytrust.org, or call 1-866-ENTRUST (368-7878).

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Medical tests free to seniors

Northwest Wellness Clinic will be at the Vernonia Senior Center May 14, starting at 8:00 a.m. to provide health screening tests for bone density, arteriosclerosis, cholesterol level, blood sugar level, thyroid function and PSA.

The screenings are free to seniors 60 and up. People under 60 can also have the tests done, though there will be a charge.

These health screenings have been made available through a preventive health grant obtained by Community Action Team. For more information, or to sign up, call 503-429-9112.