

Study shows seniors want information to improve their health

A study released this month reports that seniors are very good at maintaining their health and they respond well to information about behaviors that could improve their health.

A Duke University team studied the extent of healthy aging using ten different measures of nearly all the seniors in Cache County, Utah. The 3,500 participants, all at least 65 years of age as of January, 2005, were asked to rate their health along these lines: independent living, vision, hearing,

activities of daily living, instrumental activities of daily living, absence of physical illness, cognition, healthy mood, social support and participation, and religious participation and spirituality.

"Despite very serious illnesses that come with age, such as dementias, our study emphasizes that many Americans are aging well into their 80s and beyond and are enjoying healthy 'successful' aging," said study author Dr. Kathleen Welsh-Bohmer.

The study demonstrated that long spans of illness and disability are not necessarily part of normal aging. Americans generally are healthy to a point near their death, and then usually experience a short period of ill health immediately before death. This belies the common thought that aging is associated with a long period of gradual decline leading to death.

"Older people are healthy, and it is important for health providers to keep this optimistic perspective and share it with their elderly clients," according to lead study author and professor Dr. Truls Ostbye, of Duke's Department of Community and Family Medicine. "We hear a lot about disease and disability among the elderly, but the quality of life in older individuals is actually, by most measures used, high up to the oldest of age."

- 80 to 90 percent of persons aged 65 to 75 were healthy according to each of the ten measures. As people aged, they tended to report excellent and good health less often, down to 60% in those 85 and older. Even among the oldest, the majority of respondents were independent in activities of daily living.

- 90 percent or more of seniors in every age category lived at home and more than nine of 10 seniors in every age group were free of depression or otherwise considered to have a healthy mood.

- 50 percent of participants were free from any major disease, the rest were living with at least one physical problem. Most continued to report at least fair health and the ability to perform most activities of

daily living and other physical activities despite chronic conditions. The percentage of participants without chronic illness fell slightly as individuals aged, but still, of people 85 and older, 40% of men and 42% of women did not suffer from any major disease.

"Many people in this study with chronic diseases were not in bad overall health," according to Katrina Krause, a co-author of the study. "And as they got older, a chronic disease did not necessarily mean they were disabled."

Many of the problems older individuals listed that hurt their overall health and quality of life can be modified, says Krause. The three most common factors affecting self-reported health — poor vision, hearing loss and mood — can often be treated with, for example, prescription glasses, hearing aids or anti-depressant medications.

"There are no guarantees for healthy aging," says Welsh-Bohmer. Regular medical check-ups, proper diet and exercise, maintaining good social networks and getting adequate rest are several things that can help.

Welsh-Bohmer emphasized the importance of modifying health habits. "How we fare health-wise in our later years is in part related to the genes we inherit and in part related to the many health and environmental factors we are exposed to over our lifetime. By attending to factors such as healthy diets and exercise, we reduce the risk of many chronic diseases, such as heart disease, some cancers, and diabetes and may also ensure better quality of life in our twilight years," she

explains.

The study was funded by the National Institutes on Aging and reported in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, for February 2006.

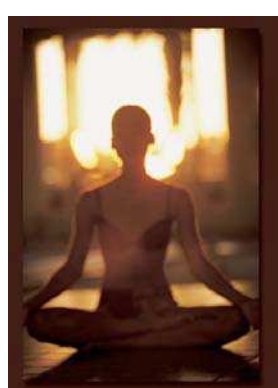
Livestock talk on selenium in pastures

Gene Pirelli, Oregon State University livestock specialist, will present a program aimed at beef and sheep producers about the use of selenium as an addition to pasture fertilizers. The program is set for February 17, at 10:00 a.m. at the Knappa Water District office building in Knappa.

The program is free and open to the public, according to Chip Bubl, Columbia County Extension Agent. Pirelli's talk will focus on the role selenium plays in animal health and how to best get this crucial mineral into a feeding program. Selenium is in very short supply in Western Oregon soils. Pirelli has done research on pasture fertilization with trace amounts of selenium and will describe the applicability to Clatsop and Columbia County farmers.

He will also talk briefly about grass tetany, a serious problem last spring in this area. There will be an opportunity to ask questions on beef/sheep nutrition and other management topics. There may be some time to discuss animal livestock identification issues as well.

For more information, call the Columbia County Extension office at 503-397-3462.



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