

Active seniors enjoy life more

Good news for seniors: Part of the prescription for a healthier, better retirement is exercise. That simple? Yes, it is! Physical exercise has been proven to discourage declines in health and fitness. Join the growing number of seniors who are actively demonstrating that exercise helps keep a body strong and on the go.

Did you know that moderate physical activity can help you live longer? That it can actually reduce health hazards? It's true.

So is the fact that regular exercise helps control blood pressure, body weight and cholesterol levels, and reduces the risks of hardening of the arteries, heart attack and stroke.

A well-balanced fitness program holds other benefits, too. It conditions muscles, tendons, ligaments and bones to help fight osteoporosis, keep your body more limber and stabilize your joints, lowering the risk of everyday injury. Regular physical activity can even help you maintain independence.

Physical exercise is proba-

bly the best all-natural laxative you'll find. It not only improves digestion, but exercise is also good for managing lower back pain, arthritis and diabetes. And recently, there's been more indication that an active lifestyle helps lower the risk for certain types of cancer.

But maybe the best reason for incorporating regular exercise into your life is that you'll feel better and enjoy life more. Exercise helps you sleep better, manage stress better, and gives you more endurance to enjoy work and play.

A good senior fitness program is one that includes aerobics, muscular conditioning, along with exercises to stretch your body and promote good posture. Start with a light regime and work your way up slowly.

The best aerobics for seniors are non-jarring ones, like walking, swimming, cycling and low-impact aerobic dance.

If you haven't been doing muscular conditioning, begin with the calisthenics you probably remember. As you get used to these exercises, add some gentle resistance, such as light hand weights or low-tension rubber exercise tubing. As your conditioning improves, you could incorporate variable-resistance exercise machinery, but be sure you do so under qualified supervision. Heavy-resistance routines are not recommended for seniors. The key to safe and effective exercise for seniors is moderation.

Don't ignore the other elements that contribute to good senior health, including eating a well-balanced diet, not smoking and seeing your doctor

To Your Health!

By Judy Hargis, P.A., and Audeen Wagner



This column is presented as a community service to address various health issues and bring current health information to readers of *The Independent*. "To Your Health!" will be offered on a monthly basis, and will consider many different topics having to do with general health questions, including the following:

Understanding the healthcare system and health insurance; healthy lifestyles for adults and children; updates on current men's and women's health issues; holistic integrative medicine; creating a partnership with health providers, and other issues of interest to rural patients; and more!

We are experiencing a healthcare crisis in this country. This crisis affects our access to healthcare and our overall health. Obesity rates have reached epidemic proportions. It is estimated that 58 million Americans are overweight and 40 million are obese. Childhood obesity is on the rise. New studies suggest that 1 in 4 children who are obese are showing early signs of type II diabetes and 60 percent have at least one risk factor for heart disease.

There has been a 76 percent increase in type II diabetes in adults 30 to 40 years old and 78 percent of Americans are not meeting basic ac-

tivity recommendations.

Healthcare costs are skyrocketing and an increasing number of people are uninsured or underinsured. Rising premiums and high deductibles are making affordable healthcare and preventive services inaccessible to many individuals and families. Through this column we hope to provide information on health care issues, and to give valuable tips on staying healthy.

February is National Heart Month. Here are a few Do's and Don'ts: DO learn more about a "heart-healthy diet" – high in vitamin C, and low in sodium, cholesterol and fat. Increase whole grains, fruits and vegetables in your daily meals.

DON'T overlook the omega-3s in your diet. They are the fatty acids supplied by fatty fish and certain vegetable oils. DO lower your cholesterol if it's high, especially your "bad" cholesterol (that's the "LDL" number in your cholesterol reading, which for most people should be less than 99). DO get more exercise. People who don't exercise have a higher risk for hypertension and heart disease. Just 20-30 minutes a day of walking can be a huge benefit – find some kind of exercise that is fun, and get moving! You'll be glad you did. DO maintain emotional health – try to decrease stress in your life and curb anger. It can be as basic as a good laugh! Did you know that laughter relaxes the blood vessels? Amazing.

Suggestions, comments and questions from readers of this column will be welcome – feedback from readers will be encouraged and appreciated, and we will address any suggestions or concerns. You can reach us at *The INDEPENDENT*, Attn: To Your Health!, 725 Bridge St., Vernonia, OR 97064.

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There are plenty of choices out there for seniors. Favorites among seniors are aqua aerobics, yoga, Tai Chi, line dancing, square dancing, ballroom dancing, even taking your dog for a walk. There are also many group exercise classes you might enjoy that offer social benefits as well.

When you're deciding on the

class or program that suits you best, we recommend you select one with an instructor certified by an internationally recognized professional organization, such as the American Council on Exercise. Also, check to be sure the instructor has completed specialty training in senior health and fitness.

Look at your retirement or senior years as an opportunity

to do things you never did before. Enjoy yourself!

Source: *The American Council on Exercise*.

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