

To Your Health!

By Judy Hargis, P.A.



Brain Smart at any Age

Stanley Kunitz was named poet laureate at the age of 95. Still writing new poems and reading to live audiences, he stands as an inspiring example of the brain's ability to stay vital in the final years of our lives. Although much of the brain remains a mystery, groundbreaking discoveries are being made about how it ages.

It was once thought that we lost vast numbers of neurons (nerve cells) as we aged. Scientists now recognize that the brain is far more resilient than once believed. In fact, it has become really clear that if you do not have a specific disease that causes loss of neurons, most, if not all, neurons remain healthy until you die. Our life span has increased from an average age of 47 in the 1900s, to 75 today. Thus, there has been little time to study the aging brain until recent years. It seems that not only wisdom comes with age, but according to new studies we actually learn and problem solve better in our 50s and 60s.

The brain is an amazing organ. It is responsible for everything from involuntary functions like heart beats and breathing to personality and memory. It contains more than a billion cells, including neurons. Neurons are specialized cells that can send signals to thousands of other cells at a rate of about 200 miles per hour. It is a complicated system of chemical and electrical impulses that we still do not understand well. New research indicates that the rate of change in the

aging brain can be hastened or slowed by lifestyle factors. Things that can improve and maintain brain function include education, exercise and rest. Things that can negatively impact brain function include stress, hypertension, and diabetes.

Although genes can play a role in predetermining our brains' aging, researchers are beginning to agree that taking care of our health may help long term brain function. There are things we can do to improve and maintain our brain function. It comes down, once again, to taking care of our health. Research demonstrates that maintaining a healthy weight, eating a healthy diet and regular exercise are critical. Exercise should involve 45 minutes of such things as a brisk walk, at least three times a week.

Mental exercise is important too. Reading, taking up new hobbies and learning new skills are important.

Strict control of blood sugar, cholesterol and blood pressure can also have a significant impact.

We have all seen impressive older adults, who are sky diving, climbing mountains and running marathons. Individuals who go back to school or work into their 80s or 90s. For most of us, our biggest fear is losing our mental functions as we age.

You don't have to be a super athlete or a poet laureate to keep your brain healthy. You just have to follow the recommendations discussed above to keep your body and mind healthy. We have the potential to live long, healthy and productive lives. This is an exciting time for the 10,000 baby boomers who are hitting age 50 every day.

As always, I am happy to hear from you via email at Rebecca@the-independent.net.

March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

by Chris Thomas, Oregon News Service

Between 60 and 70 percent of Oregonians over age 50 have had colonoscopies to screen for colon cancer, which means at least three out of 10 have not. March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, and there is new medical evidence that these tests pay off. The National Polyp Study followed patients for up to 23 years after they had polyps removed during a colonoscopy.

Dr. Robert Raish with the Knight Cancer Institute at Oregon Health and Science University says not all of the growths are cancerous, but if they're left in place, they can change. "The time frame is usually pretty long – it can take five, 10 or 15 years before it turns into cancer. So, the general principle of colonoscopic screening is that if you take out a polyp, you prevent the disease."

The study suggests that removing polyps reduces death rates by half. The five-year survival rate drops from 90 percent when colon cancer is caught early to 11 percent after it spreads to other areas of the body.

Claire Greco of Portland said the first colonoscopy she had revealed some polyps,

which were then removed. Now a veteran of several follow-ups, she says dreading the test is not the best mind-set, "I really consider this relatively easy procedure to go through as a gift to myself and a gift to my family. The momentary inconvenience, which isn't really all that bad, isn't that difficult."

Greco knows people are squeamish about the test, but she says colonoscopies have improved over the years, "The procedure itself, any more, isn't bad, with the medication that they give you and the environment. You go to sleep – next thing you know, you wake up and you're done. The prep is interesting to go through, but not that bad, really, because again, they have it down to a pretty good science."

After 26 years as an oncologist, Dr. Raish has this advice for anyone avoiding a colonoscopy, "By far the best way to deal with cancer is to prevent it in the first place. It's not a disease you want to get. You want to see me in the grocery store; you never want to see me in the office."

The Colon Cancer Alliance says more than 140,000 cases will be diagnosed this year, and almost 50,000 people will die from colon cancer in the United States.

MCR's are saving lives in county Mammogram van scheduled

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whelmed, and a trained corps of nurses can save lives and ease the burden on local services.

Members of the MRC include Kacie Kraft, Danielle Nelson, Cathy Weber, Robin Loper and Tish Hora of St. Helens; Teresa McGivern, Carla Coler

and Gayle Case of Scappoose; Debbie Johnstone of Columbia City; Lowell Norbom of Deer Island; Erin O'Connell of Rainier; Marilyn Thomas and Robin Ostoj of Clatskanie; Monica Petersen and Suzanne Paleck of Vernonia; and Heather Bee of Clatsop County.

Those interested in more information can check online at www.tphfcc.org and look under the Preparedness section, or call Parrott at 503-397-4651, ext 2022.

Tuality Healthcare's Mobile Mammogram van will be in Vernonia on the following dates: March 29, April 26, May 31, June 28, July 26, August 30, September 27, October 25, and December 13. As usual, the van will be parked in the Vernonia Health Clinic parking lot on Bridge St.

To schedule an appointment, call 503-681-4035.

Join us for a Spaghetti Feast Benefit Dinner for Ryan Roberts Kidney Fund
 Also featuring a Silent Auction
At the Scout Cabin in Hawkins Park
March 21 from 4 P.M. to 5 P.M.
Mariolino's 503-429-5018

Columbia County	Domestic Abuse
Mental Health	Hotline
800-294-5211	503-397-6161
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Suicide Hotline	866-397-6161
1-800-	-----
784-2433	Military Helpline
or	888-HLP-4-VET
1-800-273-	(888-457-4838)
TALK(8255)	