

Small Steps toward Health

Lead to Big Rewards

The good news is that today, the average 65 year old male can expect to live another 15 plus years, and a female at 65, another 19 plus years. The not-so-good news is that as we age, the risk for chronic disease increases rapidly. Diabetes and high cholesterol can become a problem in our 50's; high blood pressure and coronary heart disease between ages 45 and 65; arthritis in our late 40's, and so on. Eyesight declines, flexibility becomes a thing of the past, memory fades...wait a minute--what kind of a life is this anyway?



But things are not as bleak as they may first appear. Take a good look around you at the healthy older people living in your neighborhood. There's the 75 year old that runs three to five miles six days a week; the active people in square dancing clubs or those who bicycle or hike around the country. Or those who are starting a second career or volunteering in service organizations to help others less fortunate than themselves.

The claim that "if you don't use it, you loose it" is very true. The Surgeon General's report on physical activity states that we need 30 minutes of moderate activity at least five days per week. This does not mean huffing and puffing, but it does mean getting out and moving around. Adding movement to our lives increases the feel-good hormones in our bodies; such activity can lower the need for insulin (if you are diabetic), raise good cholesterol (HDL), lower blood pressure, improve one's mood, and help the heart beat stronger.

Take a minute to consider some of these tips for healthier living:

- Rethink your activity and health behaviors. Remember to start slowly, get your doctor's permission, and increase gradually.
- Walking can increase muscle tone and bone strength, the lack of which contributes to our sedentary lives and leads to falls and other diseases. If you walk five minutes a day for four days, increase your daily walk to seven minutes next week.
- Getting outside during daylight can help raise the level of neurotransmitters in our brains, raising serotonin levels and helping us sleep better at night.
- Add some brain activity too. Join a book club, read a new magazine while you're on a bike at the health club, visit a new ethnic restaurant and try

some low fat foods you haven't tried before. Or call a friend you haven't seen in a while and make a date to get together for a visit.

- If you can't walk or don't have transportation, practice strength training skills in your living room--raise a soup can to shoulder height every time a commercial comes on TV.
- Begin to lower the fat in your daily diet by not adding butter or margarine to foods (try cooking in chicken bouillon or white wine).

If you don't know where to start to get more information about healthy activities and programs in your area, contact some of the following:

- Your local hospital
- American Heart Association
- American Diabetes Association
- Your local community center or YM/YWCA.
- Your senior centers
- Local libraries for more information on fitness and wellness programs

For additional information, contact your Quest EAP at

1-800-364-6352

and request a referral to our Eldercare Consultant.

