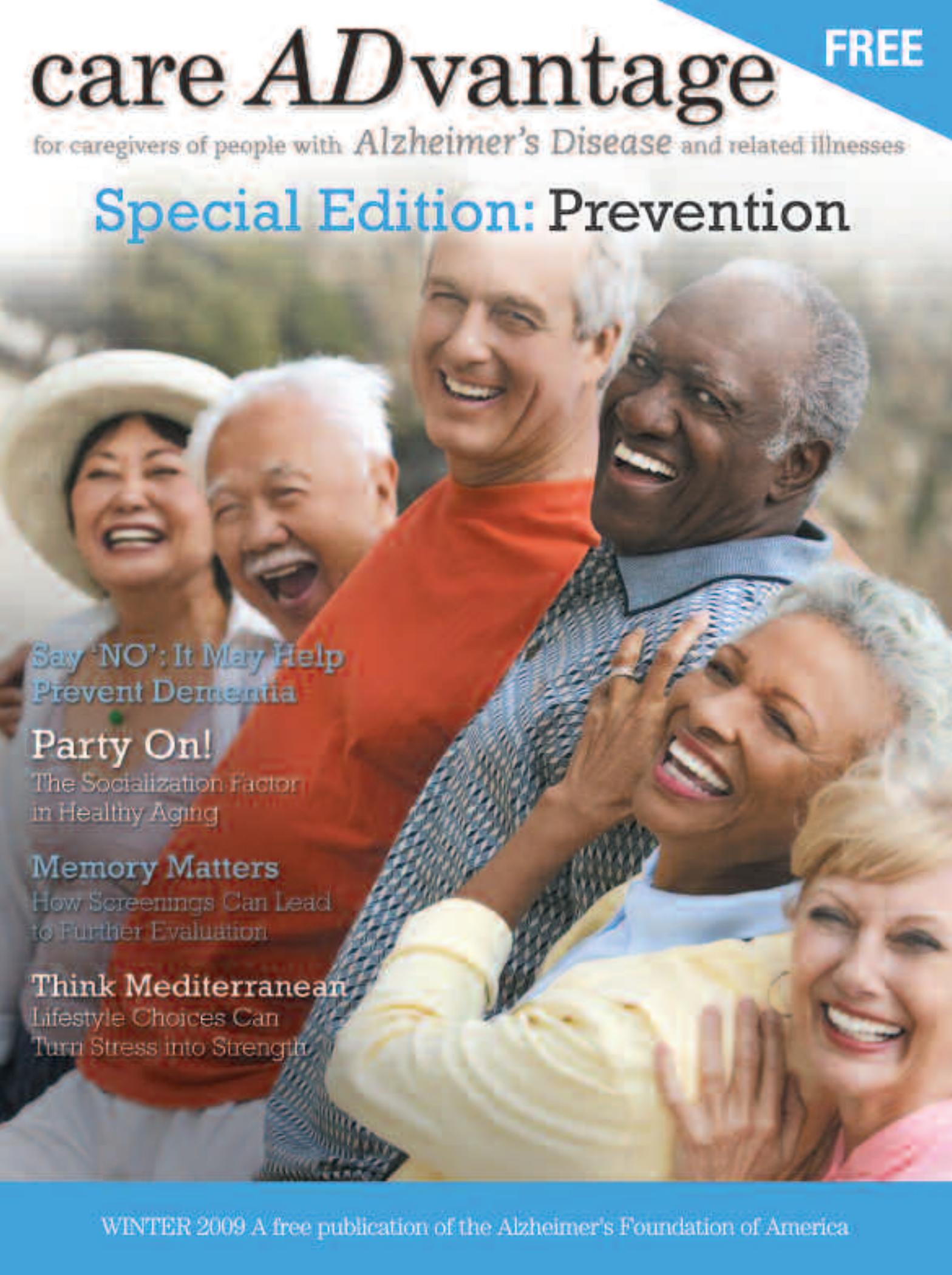


care *AD*vantage

FREE

for caregivers of people with *Alzheimer's Disease* and related illnesses

Special Edition: Prevention



**Say 'NO': It May Help
Prevent Dementia**

Party On!

The Socialization Factor
in Healthy Aging

Memory Matters

How Screenings Can Lead
to Further Evaluation

Think Mediterranean

Lifestyle Choices Can
Turn Stress into Strength

The Power of Prevention

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- Columns by
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COVER PHOTO: © moodboard | Dreamstime.com

[THE VIEW]

The entire care cycle begins with people taking care of themselves.

If you're a caregiver, you know what I mean. Taking care of yourself is important for your own mental and physical health, as well as for the ability to take care of your loved one.

In the care arena, each day, the Alzheimer's Foundation of America (AFA) helps people affected by the disease find support and resources—through our hot line, our Web site (www.alzfdn.org), our educational materials and our national events like National Memory Screening Day. There is little doubt that AFA is making a difference.

Today, I announce another important milestone in AFA's services: an emphasis on information that may change the future for many people. I am talking about prevention.

As a big part of this initiative, in addition to AFA's main Web site, we are proudly introducing a new Web site—**www.alzprevention.org**. Please take a look.

The pages of www.alzprevention.org are exclusively devoted to the possible prevention of Alzheimer's disease and related illnesses. We will continually add content on a wide range of topics, especially as research continues to evolve and as definitive strategies emerge. Besides the information we provide, we welcome consumers to weigh in on the site through its message board and blog.

Also as a critical part of this initiative, we have assembled an advisory board made up of leaders in the field of prevention. They have agreed to collaborate with AFA to share information and provide the latest findings to help all of us beat the odds.

This special edition of care *AD*vantage reflects some of the myriad topics that our new Web site and advisory board will be addressing in the days ahead.

All of these components emphasize our commitment to help guide you in the prevention arena. But we are just one spoke in a much larger wheel. As I said upfront, the entire care cycle begins with people taking care of themselves. So it's up to you to make a commitment, too. Our ad campaign announcing www.alzprevention.org sums it up best: Go for it!

Regards,



ERIC J. HALL
PRESIDENT AND CEO
ALZHEIMER'S FOUNDATION OF AMERICA

[OBSERVATIONS]

While it may seem like yesterday

that I had a Sweet Sixteen party, turned “legal” and qualified as middle-aged, there's no stopping the fact that I'm getting older. I am. You are. We all are.

But age is just a “number.” So says my aunt. In January, while her birth certificate confirms that she hit 94, she'll tell you she turned “49.” Two years ago, at 92, she was really a spring chicken: 29.

I think Aunt Ethel is on to something—something big. We should all strive to feel younger on the inside, even if our bodies look older on the outside.

Just turn to the growing body of research (see page 4) that reinforces the value of a healthy lifestyle. We are what we eat. We are how we exercise. We are what we imbibe and smoke. A healthy body and a healthy mind appear to go hand-in-hand.

A healthy lifestyle is so important that we have devoted this entire edition of care *AD*vantage to strategies that may help prevent Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia.

Especially as we get older, we must look not at our age, but at the numbers that really count—like waist circumference, weight and blood pressure. These reflect the types of conditions, such as obesity and

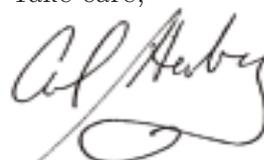
hypertension, that are suggested risk factors for dementia (see page 6).

Among other lifestyle choices that count are how we act to reduce stress (see page 11) and how we interact with others (see page 14).

In addition, a big part of prevention is being in tune with yourself. For example, if you have memory concerns, take action since early detection has multiple benefits (see page 8).

There's a lot more that can be done in regard to prevention. Even if you don't go full speed ahead at first, consider taking two or three baby steps—and then stepping up your routine. When added together, they may make giant strides toward reaching Aunt Ethel's “49.”

Take care,



CAROL STEINBERG
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF





Connecting Your Questions and Our Answers

A Q&A WITH **PAULETTE SCHWARTZ, LMSW, QDCP**,
A SOCIAL WORKER AND PROJECT COORDINATOR
AT THE ALZHEIMER'S FOUNDATION OF AMERICA

Question: Since I have a family history of Alzheimer's disease, I'm thinking that maybe I should get involved in clinical trials focused on prevention to "save" my kids and grandkids from getting this terrible disease. What should I know before I sign up?

Answer: Clinical trials are going on all the time, including those related to possible prevention and treatment of Alzheimer's disease and related illnesses. By participating, you may be adding to an awareness of your own health as well as getting information about or access to new therapies.

Most of all, you'll want to make sure the clinical trial is reputable, and that you understand the risks and benefits as well as the goals of the study and how they will be achieved. Other things to ask about are time involved, any costs and any requirements to alter your current medications or daily routines.

If you meet the criteria for enrollment, the research investigators should require you to sign an informed consent. Informed consent explains all of the risks and benefits associated with the research, which would also include your ability to drop out of the study at any time. To find a trial, visit www.alzfdn.org.

Question: My husband has Alzheimer's disease. I keep hearing that mental and physical exercise can help protect against Alzheimer's disease. But would this work for my husband, since he already has the disease?

Answer: Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is important for all individuals as they age, and it is especially important for people diagnosed with a disease. Alzheimer's disease is a progressive illness, and a healthy lifestyle may help maintain or improve quality of life for both individuals with the disease and their caregivers.

Although your husband has Alzheimer's disease, it is important for him to stay both physically and mentally active as long as possible since this may help stimulate remaining healthy brain cells and delay the progression of symptoms.

Staying active also can help minimize behaviors such as anxiety or depression related to the illness. In addition, being with other people, both family and peers, is essential to maintain socialization skills.

If you do not have the time to plan or engage your loved one in activities, you might want to consider an adult day program that provides recreational therapies and the opportunity for socialization.

Question: As a caregiver, I'm tired and stressed all the time. My friend told me that this could make me more susceptible to Alzheimer's disease. Is this true?

Answer: Caregivers often are so busy taking care of their loved ones that they ignore taking care of themselves. That doesn't help you or your loved one. Studies show that caregivers of people with Alzheimer's disease face more physical and mental health problems than any other caregivers.

Stress is a major health hazard. The more tired and stressed your mind and body are, the more you put yourself at risk for various illnesses, including depression, weight gain and high blood pressure, which may boost the chances of developing Alzheimer's disease.

In addition to affecting your well-being, stress can impact your role as a caregiver. It can leave you distracted, unfocused, tired or disorganized, and these symptoms can lead to irritable mood, poor performance or just general carelessness.

Managing stress can be accomplished in many ways (see page 11). Finding a small window of time a day for yourself is essential to improve your own quality of life.

Tracking the Latest PREVENTION-FOCUSED Studies from Professional Journals

BMC Geriatrics (online) • December 23, 2008

Before you light up, consider more evidence that smoking is bad for your health—especially if you're 65 or older. An analysis of two dozen published studies involving older adults found that current smokers face a significantly higher risk of developing Alzheimer's disease than non-smokers. Plus, the nicotine habit may also boost the chances of other types of dementia and cognitive decline. In their discussion, the UK authors said their findings match other data that links smoking with cardiovascular disease, stroke and other conditions that are risk factors for dementia. While the review did not clearly associate ex-smoking with the brain disorder, the authors noted, "Evidence presented here adds another reason for ceasing to smoke or for preventing smoking from starting."

Neurology • January 20, 2009

Go with the flow. Now, a new study reinforces the cliché. In exploring the connection between personality traits and lifestyle factors and the risk of dementia, scientists concluded that relaxed individuals had a 50 percent less chance of developing dementia than those who were neurotic, or overanxious, and socially isolated. While the super-outgoing in the cool, calm and collected group had the lowest dementia risk, even their counterparts with less active social lives halved the risk of the disorder.

Journal of Alzheimer's Disease • January 2009

Whether it's Starbucks, Dunkin' Donuts or another coffee of choice, this pick-me-up beverage can help prevent Alzheimer's disease, according to new research. Examining the drinking habits of about 1,400 middle-aged people in Finland over a 21-year period, scientists found that those who consumed three to five cups of coffee daily cut their risk of developing dementia later in life by 60 percent to 65 percent, compared to those who drank little or no coffee. Tea consumption was also tracked; however, it was relatively uncommon and

not associated with dementia. "The finding needs to be confirmed by other studies, but it opens the possibility that dietary interventions could modify the risk," said Miia Kivipelto, the lead researcher and an associate professor at the University of Kuopio, Finland.

Journal of the American Geriatrics Society • January 2009

What can be done to prevent unintentional weight loss? The question arises for individuals with Alzheimer's disease, since they typically drop pounds due to physical changes and behavioral issues as the disease advances. Working off the foundation that these individuals experience low and progressively declining levels of omega-3 fatty acids, researchers tested whether fish oil supplements would boost appetite—as assessed by caregivers—and weight in individuals with mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease. While there was no significant difference in the treatment groups, the scientists concluded that the positive link between higher levels of DHA blood levels and weight gain indicates that omega-3 supplements, especially those enriched with DHA, may improve appetite and increase weight.

Diabetes • January 2009

Evidence continues to mount linking diabetes and dementia. Individuals with an onset of diabetes before age 65 face a 125 percent increased risk of Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia, according to a large-scale study involving twins. The risk was the same when genetics and childhood environment were accounted for.

Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (online) • February 2, 2009

Is Alzheimer's disease a type of brain diabetes? A Northwestern University-led research team raised this idea in reporting that insulin and a drug, rosiglitazone, that is used to treat type 2 diabetes helped protect damage to neurons exposed to the toxic proteins that build up in Alzheimer's disease.



Successfully Getting Over the 65+ Hill

THE SITUATION

“65” is often considered a turning point. And so it is as well for Alzheimer’s disease: with age the greatest risk factor for the brain disorder, the number of people with the disease doubles every five years beyond age 65. However, this milestone can also be looked at positively—a time to really concentrate on successful aging. By incorporating these 15 steps into your daily life, people over 65 (and under 65) can help protect their bodies and brains as they age.

THE SOLUTION

- **Develop a healthy attitude.** You’re never too old to start taking care of your physical and mental health. Doing so can make the difference between another good decade or a decade of disability.
- **Exercise regularly.** Studies show that a 30-minute walk each day is optimal.
- **Flex your mind.** Learn new things and take new mental challenges throughout life.
- **Maintain social contacts.** Loneliness is deadly for older people. A network of friends will stimulate the brain and the soul.
- **Stay psychologically fit.** Depression is a common—but not a normal—part of growing older and may hasten the onset of intellectual loss. Talk with your doctor.
- **Quit smoking.** Many older people have the attitude, “It doesn’t make any difference, the harm is done.” People can feel better and avoid smoking-related health problems by quitting cigarettes at any age.
- **Stay trim.** Obesity in older persons can increase health problems, including driving up blood sugars and boosting the risk for dementia. Chronic obesity in middle age may increase the risk of dementia in later life.
- **Limit alcohol.** Alcohol damages the heart, liver, muscles and nerves, and excess drinking can lead to falls and injuries. Limit consumption to one ounce per day. People with Alzheimer’s disease should not drink any alcohol.

- **Understand your medications.** Frequently, doctors do not talk to other doctors so your medications may interact or overlap. You’re responsible for understanding your medications and asking questions about side effects.
- **Watch your diet.** Eat a balanced diet and take an all-purpose vitamin. Calcium supplementation is important to maintain bone strength.
- **Find a doctor you trust.** Look for a primary care doctor who understands health problems in older persons, since medication doses, medical management strategies and treatment philosophy is different than for younger individuals.
- **Take your doctor’s advice.** Having a smart doctor doesn’t work if you don’t take the doctor’s advice. If you trust your doctor, then do what he or she says.
- **Keep your soul healthy.** Spiritual fitness is as important as your physical and psychological health and can reduce the incidence of health problems.
- **Control your future.** With a higher risk of experiencing a health emergency, older people should make their wishes known to family and document them.
- **Enjoy your life.** Humor and joy will lift your spirit, strengthen your body and feed your soul.

— WRITTEN BY RICHARD E. POWERS, M.D.

PREPARE IN ADVANCE

You don’t have to wait until your 65th birthday to start on the road to successful aging. Implement a heart-healthy and brain-healthy regimen at any age. Discuss strategies with your primary care provider.

WRITTEN BY **CAROL STEINBERG**

Julie Michener turned 51 this month. Like past birthdays, adding another candle ignited a mix of emotions. On one hand, it was a haunting reminder of how each passing year can turn painfully south as you age. It happened to her mother: first, bone loss, then arthritis, bursitis and, the most devastating, Alzheimer's disease, which took her life at age 84.

But at the same time, another birthday meant a celebration of life—*her* healthy life, one that she diligently strives to keep that way. Michener's whirlwind physical activity each week includes walking, yoga or Pilate five to six days, riding her horse three to four times and gardening. Plus she nixes fast food, devours organic products and tackles crossword puzzles.

For years, Michener, a media relations manager at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, MN, had slowly been changing her way of life. Then, in 1999, when her mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, she said, "I really knew I had to get serious."

"I realized that if I ignored taking care of my health the same way my mother had that I was heading down a path toward a not very healthful retirement," she said. "I am determined to spend my retirement years—whenever they get here—doing what I want to do and not hampered by medical conditions I could have prevented."

Whether or not affected by Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia themselves or in their families, countless others are also just saying "no" to unhealthy lifestyles. When it comes to successful aging, there's a growing body of evidence emphasizing how important it is for people of all ages to ditch bad habits, be proactive and say "yes" to healthy choices that may decrease the risk of developing or advancing diseases, including dementia.

Paul D. Nussbaum, Ph.D., an adjunct associate professor in neurological surgery at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, and author of "Your Brain Health Lifestyle," cites a growing awareness about the ability to "manage" brain health.

"As research has empowered us with the knowledge that the human brain can be shaped and nurtured by a proactive lifestyle," Nussbaum said, "we can now integrate physical activity, mental stimulation, socialization, spirituality and nutrition into our daily lives, thereby maximizing the health of our brains and delaying the onset of a potential neurodegenerative disease such as Alzheimer's."



SAY NO! PREVENT

While new insight is continually emerging on preventive strategies, experts point out all results are subject to change with future research and advances in the field.

For this reason, "It is always important to discuss research findings with a healthcare professional before adjusting treatments or lifestyle or making other changes that can affect your health," cautioned Richard E. Powers, M.D., chairman of the Alzheimer's Foundation of America's Medical Advisory Board.

Scientists agree that there are some risk factors for Alzheimer's disease, the most common type of dementia, that we simply cannot control: Age is the greatest determinant, with the prevalence of Alzheimer's disease doubling every five years beyond age 65. Secondly, genetics comes into play, especially in the form of Alzheimer's disease known as young-onset, occurring between ages 30 and 60.

But there are many avoidable perils that we have power over. For most, a common sense course of action, including the key elements of physical exercise and healthy diet, can help.

Here are some of the risks to sidestep to help stop dementia in its tracks:

Being a couch potato. Inactivity, inertia, idleness, couch potato-ness—whatever you want to call it—doesn't help blood flow to vital organs, which is necessary to rejuvenate and even replenish brain cells.

It's important to get your body and your brain moving. Brisk walks, jogging, kickboxing and other aerobics can get your heart pumping. For mental aerobics, try tackling new skills like a different language or the computer, visiting museums, doing puzzles or joining a book club; doing these activities with others provides the extra brain-healthy bonus of socialization.

After having received a diagnosis of early Alzheimer's disease in 2005 at age 67, Jay Smith of Los Angeles



IT MAY HELP DEMENTIA

self-designed—after lots of Web searches and reading—a healthy lifestyle approach as his primary treatment strategy in addition to prescription medications for Alzheimer's disease. As part of this, he developed his mental workout, besides daily Sudoku, around his passion for music: he studies guitar and mandolin, takes vocal lessons and does choral singing.

Likewise, Sydney Johnston of Lilburn, GA makes mental exercise a critical aspect of her overall brain health plan—one which she said she follows partly because her family tree, including her maternal grandmother, is “swarming” with cases of cognitive decline.

A believer in “the brain's ability to form new connections,” she's always trying to learn new things. Cartooning and learning Spanish are her latest endeavors. And she holds a huge collection of puzzle books, especially logic books.

“If there's anything I can do to avoid Alzheimer's, I'm going to do it,” said Johnston, 66.

Tippling the scale. It's not only about looking good; it's also about feeling good. Being overweight or obese can alter the way insulin is produced and destroyed in our bodies, which may trigger brain inflammation. Excess weight poses a greater chance of developing diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and other conditions that are risk factors for dementia.

Weight control includes exercising, a healthy diet and keeping your body mass index and waist circumference within suggested guidelines. Even a small weight loss—just 10 percent of your current weight—can help reduce risk, according to Powers. Especially important, he said: “Deflate the spare tire around the beltline.”

Bob DeMarco, who left his role as CEO of a software company to become a full-time caregiver to his mother in Delray Beach, FL, said he faces three strikes against him: he was concerned about his mother's diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease and a family history of diabetes, and

he wanted to avoid the higher incidence of depression that strikes caregivers.

So DeMarco looked down at his belly—and decided to trim the fat. The 58-year-old caregiver had a waistline of 38 inches when his mother was diagnosed four years ago, and now, by following a healthier diet and exercising, it's down to 34. The best part: he's gotten his 92-year-old mother to exercise as well, walking the treadmill right alongside him at the gym.

“In a way, I guess you could say I benefited from my mother's situation as it made me focus on my own health,” he said.

Rising blood pressure. High blood pressure, or hypertension, can damage blood vessels in the brain, as well as other organs like the heart and kidneys. That's why it is so critical to prevent it or catch it early. The tricky part is that hypertension rarely has symptoms until serious physical damage has occurred—thus, its infamous tag as “the silent killer.”

The goal is to prevent hypertension or lower already high blood pressure; in other words, to keep your blood pressure within the normal range—not too high and not too low. Therapies include antihypertensive medication and lifestyle modifications, such as doing aerobic exercise, limiting alcohol intake, quitting smoking and following the DASH Diet (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) recommended by the National Institutes of Health.

Drinking alcohol. It's not the sporadic beer or glass of wine that poses danger, but rather imbibing the spirits too much and for too long. Prolonged and heavy drinking of alcohol can cause a type of dementia known as alcohol related dementia, which is one of the five most common types of dementia in older persons. In addition, it can also worsen the intellectual and psychiatric symptoms in individuals with Alzheimer's disease or other types of dementia.

What's the limit? According to Powers, a person who drinks more than one ounce of alcohol per day should discuss this habit with his or her primary care provider. Individuals with dementia should not be drinking at all.

Michener said her mother, unfortunately, didn't follow any of the practices that prevention pundits advocate today.

Noting her mother's diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease, she suggested: “I can't stress enough to be mindful and thoughtful of your own health...To live with the consequences are so devastating.”

MEMORY MATTERS

How Screenings Can Lead to Further Evaluation and Promote Cognitive Wellness

WRITTEN BY **RICHARD E. POWERS, M.D., J. WESSON ASHFORD, M.D., Ph.D.,** and **SUSAN PESCHIN**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Most persons with dementia remain undiagnosed by their primary care providers, and families often fail to recognize the significance of early cognitive symptoms. In response, there has been a growing interest in screenings for memory problems.

The proposed answer is that screening for memory dysfunction, Alzheimer's disease and other dementias is important, but raises pragmatic, ethical as well as theoretical considerations that need to be addressed before general screening practices can be widely implemented.

Screenings are occurring throughout the nation by local, independent organizations, often with minimal guidance or technical assistance like that provided by national organizations such as the Alzheimer's Foundation of America (AFA) to groups participating in its screening initiative.

To refine the screening process in general, the screening of at-risk populations for dementia should become a cornerstone for early treatment or prevention of cognitive decline. Prospective prevention research will not be performed in a timely manner to confirm the value of screening so policymakers must propose the best possible option as a comprehensive approach to cognitive health.

Multiple types of screening interventions have been described in the medical literature, including person-to-person, telephone and computer-based. Screening is not a diagnosis, but can help lead to the



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referral of appropriate individuals for further evaluation or to the promotion of cognitive wellness. Screening should not produce adverse outcomes and published screening instruments can be completed in as little as five minutes.

Screening is a safe, cost-efficient intervention that can reassure the healthy individual, promotes successful aging and, when indicated, directs individuals to appropriate clinical resources.

Currently, there is no national strategy on dementia screening in particular and dementia in general, a public health problem related to an at-risk population on the threshold of a boom. It is irresponsible to leave the disease undetected to the extent it is now when there are safe tools available to increase earlier detection. There are several policy recommendations that, if implemented, would assist clinical efforts at early diagnosis and treatment for dementia, and promotion of cognitive wellness.

WHY SCREEN FOR MEMORY PROBLEMS?

One of the main arguments in favor of memory screening is that there are serious deficiencies in the healthcare system's ability to recognize dementia. A 2006 editorial in the *Journal of the American Geriatric Society* estimated that missed diagnoses are greater than 25 percent of the dementia cases and may be as high as 90 percent.

Not surprisingly, individuals with mild dementia are more likely to go unrecognized by physicians than persons with moderate to severe dementia; however, most researchers agree that most available medications are best given earlier in the disease when the individual has mild symptoms.

In addition, while close friends and family can play an important role in detection of dementia, many elderly live alone and have limited contact with distant relatives or friends.

There are additional barriers to early detection of dementia:

- Individuals are often unaware, deny or minimize the severity of symptoms, or are concerned about stigma.
- Access to quality care is a key issue for all individuals with dementia and for those of minority racial and ethnic backgrounds in particular.
- Clinician evaluation may be time consuming and not well reimbursed.
- Many, especially minority populations, believe that memory loss and cognitive decline are a normal part of aging.

WHAT IS MEMORY SCREENING AND IS IT EFFECTIVE?

A memory screening is a simple and safe evaluation tool that assesses memory and other intellectual functions and indicates whether additional testing is necessary. Memory screening can be done in a medical environment (e.g., dementia clinic, physician's office) or in a community setting (e.g. senior center, pharmacy).

The main arguments against memory screening are the unsubstantiated assertions that there are many potential adverse consequences. However, screening is neither a diagnostic or case finding process. Screening tests in general simply help determine whether diagnostic tests should be considered. A "positive" result from a memory screening should never be interpreted as a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or a related illness or other illnesses—no more than a "positive" mammogram means an individual has breast cancer.

When individuals make such screening results available to their primary care providers, the providers have the opportunity to discuss the findings with them during an office visit.

Rather than a standardized screening, some propose more "cognitive surveillance" by individuals and primary care providers, and public awareness programs based on "warning signs" of Alzheimer's disease. Such "warning signs" have not been validated and are not promoted as screening instruments; however, concern has been raised that individuals experiencing cognitive deficits and their families may treat warning sign lists as a screening tool. Although warning signs are publicized by several national organizations, including AFA, they are not a substitute for a structured screening or consultation with a primary care provider.



About Memory Matters

This article is excerpted from "Memory Matters," a report recently released by the Alzheimer's Foundation of America (AFA).

The report was authored by Richard E. Powers, M.D., chairman of the AFA Medical Advisory Board, J. Wesson Ashford, M.D., Ph.D., chairman of the AFA Memory Screening Advisory Board, and Susan Peschin, AFA's vice president of public policy. Many of the statements and themes in the report were developed by the AFA Memory Screening Advisory Board.

The complete report, including footnotes and AFA's policy recommendations, is available at www.alzfdn.org or by calling AFA at 866.232.8484.

There is ample evidence that screening can improve case identification, leading to the suggestion that community screening could double the number of individuals eventually diagnosed with dementia.

WHAT IF THE SCREEN IS POSITIVE?

As was previously stated, dementia is not diagnosed by a simple screening intervention. Persons who screen positive or who still have concerns after being tested at local screening sites during National Memory Screening Day, an event sponsored every November by AFA, are referred to their primary care providers for follow-up, and are encouraged to bring with them the results of the testing. Based on studies of other community-based screenings, up to 60 percent of individuals with positive screens seek follow-up care.

Recognition of impairment benefits the individual with the impairment, the caregiver, the family and society. For the affected individual, identification of early stage

dementia allows early aggressive use of most available treatments. The person can be offered support groups and other services to diminish the psychological impact of the disorder. Most individuals, regardless of their degree of impairment, tend to experience a sense of relief after receiving the diagnosis. Moreover, the total medical care for this cognitively impaired individual can be adjusted to meet his or her needs.

In addition, the early identification of dementia supports individual patient rights and self-determination. Most mildly impaired individuals are capable of charting the future course of their care and making substantial decisions on issues like end-of-life care, resuscitation, disposition of wealth, etc. Informing individuals about abnormal screening results does not produce hardship or harm to the individual or family caregiver.

About one-third of elders live by themselves and these individuals are at risk for accidents, injuries, exploitation and other adverse outcomes. Early identification allows safeguards and home assistance to assure continued maximization of care in the home environment.

Family caregivers derive multiple benefits from early identification. Early identification may reduce the burden

About Dementia

Some conditions that cause symptoms of dementia, such as hormone imbalance, vitamin deficiency and infections, can be reversed. For irreversible dementias, including Alzheimer's disease, treatment options vary depending on the disease.

Obtaining a proper diagnosis involves consulting with a healthcare professional knowledgeable about dementia, communicating symptoms and undergoing extensive testing. Diagnostic tools include a complete medical history; blood, urine or other medical tests; neuropsychological tests that measure memory, problem solving, attention and language; and brain scans.

of later life decision-making on issues like resuscitation, disposition of wealth, long-term care, etc. as families can solicit the opinion of their loved ones while they are still competent.

Screening and early identification may benefit society by protecting individuals and reducing costs of healthcare. Unrecognized dementia can increase the likelihood of

avoidable complications such as delirium, adverse drug reactions, noncompliance, etc.

WHAT IF THE SCREEN IS NEGATIVE?

For persons with a normal screen, memory screening provides a valuable opportunity to promote cognitive wellness and successful aging similar to efforts underway in other nations, such as Japan. A simple, direct cognitive wellness message can be presented to these individuals. The emotional boost from a normal dementia screen can be used as an opportunity to discuss basic preventive interventions such as compliance with anti-hypertensives, responsible drinking, intellectual stimulation and other recommendations that may further protect a person's cognitive function.

IS THERE ADEQUATE FOLLOW-UP?

One of the issues raised about community-based memory screening is that some participants will neglect to follow up on the recommendations resulting from the testing. It is a concern when an individual with a positive screen fails to get further diagnostic assessment, but compliance with medical recommendations is a widespread problem not only related to screening tests.

The opposite issue, that an individual with a negative screen might see this result as permanent freedom from worry about dementia, is also a concern and a misunderstanding. A negative screening result only suggests that the immediate concern about dementia can be reduced. Such a response should not be considered a harm of screening, but an area for consumer education in which the quality of the whole screening system could be improved.

Aside from issues regarding clinical follow-up, memory screening may motivate people to adopt healthy lifestyle practices. An abnormal memory screening result is similar to a high blood pressure result. Although people are aware that they should exercise and watch their diet, many do not until they find out their blood pressure is elevated. In the same way, an abnormal memory screening finding can prompt people to make lifestyle changes, such as doing crossword puzzles and other cognitive stimulation, eating a heart-healthy diet and doing physical exercise.



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Think Mediterranean

Lifestyle Choices
Can Turn Stress
into Strength

WRITTEN BY **DEBBIE MANDEL**

With massive responsibilities of family, household and career, many of us are blown about in so many different directions that we are battered into exhaustion. And we're overwhelmingly stressed as a result.

Because human beings are engineered to adapt, we have accepted our stressful lives to the point where we have become addicted to the adrenalin surge. Thanks to technology, we can keep on accomplishing our endless to-do lists, yet we go to sleep feeling dissatisfied. We don't know what to do with ourselves when we have quiet time and feel guilty about having fun—"I'm so happy I can't stand it!"

Stress challenges our equilibrium, and our response ranges from mild to intense. Sometimes stress is recognizably nerve-racking and other times it is more subtle, generalized and even hidden. But, oh, how those small stressors accumulate to overwhelm us physically and emotionally.

While *acute* stress is good for us, waking up the immune system and stimulating us to perform better, it is *chronic* stress that is the demon. Not only does it pose a risk factor for dementia, it also causes a 20 percent higher danger of mortality, according to one study.

Chronic stress is inflammatory, and inflammation stands at the root cause of disease, especially for the

cardiovascular system and the brain. Stress shrinks the hippocampus; memory is compromised. Among multiple research studies on this point, the Framingham Heart Study found that people during midlife whose blood shows signs of inflammation are twice as likely to later develop Alzheimer's disease as people with no signs of inflammation.

However, how do you manage stress when you are juggling so many roles, experiencing loss, struggling in a falling economy or experiencing compassion fatigue as a caregiver?

When it comes to mitigating stress or preventing diseases, think Mediterranean. Let's look at the lifestyle. A sunny disposition sheds stress. It's not about feigned cheerfulness, but rather consciously reframing negatives into positives to release you from a worry loop.

Everyone puts a spin on one's life story: make yours a positive, compassionate story. When you are kind and forgiving, you can let go of any perceived injustice. And don't forget to be as kind to yourself as you would be to a friend. Often the hardest person to have compassion for is the self. It's your choice to play the hero or the victim.

Humor also works well in your life story to reduce worries to absurdities and release them. You can intensify a thoughtless remark made by a boss or child into a full blown crisis or you can let it go, distance yourself by seeing the inherent humor. Generally, we take ourselves far too seriously.

Another striking feature about the Mediterranean people is how they emote. They communicate what's on their minds, gesturing with their hands, putting mind and body into natural self-expression, nothing artificial. They are spontaneous and at ease.

On the other hand, people who experience chronic stress are self-silencing, self-suppressors, often sacrificial givers. It's okay to be kind and to give, but not if you are going to tip over with resentment. Research shows this is an example of the inflammatory process that can lead to cardiovascular problems. Bottom line: If you are not heart healthy, you will not be head healthy.



Plus, Mediterranean people seem to have written the rules on being social—another ingredient that may help ward off Alzheimer's disease (see article on page 14). They smile as they greet strangers on the street, schedule get-togethers with friends and family, and love parties. Happiness is contagious—the more, the merrier.

What else can we learn from this lifestyle to turn stress into strength?

Be active. The latest research shows that exercise balances the brain, enhances synapses and even creates new neurons in the brain. Fred Gage, Ph.D., a professor at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in San Diego, referred to exercise as creating “lobes of steel.” Not only will you shed stress hormones when you work out, but you will be more likely to reinterpret a problem into a solution when endorphins—our own feel-good brain chemicals—are released as a relaxation response.

Keep changing your exercise program to wake up your brain. Better yet: combine “sound therapy” with exercise to make your mood upbeat.

If you are a caregiver, exercise together with the person you're caring for to boost his or her immune system and mood as well as your own. Bad moods are contagious, and your stress might be absorbed by the care recipient.

Follow a Mediterranean diet. It features foods with polyunsaturated omega-3 fatty acids, found in



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fatty fish like salmon, tuna, sardines and trout, and plant sources, like flaxseed; as well as a rainbow array of fruits and vegetables, legumes, multi-grain or whole wheat products, olive oil, nuts and seeds, and small amounts of red wine. The regimen makes for a healthy diet for body and mind. High blood pressure, high cholesterol levels and diabetes—which can all result from eating the wrong foods—are considered possible precursors to Alzheimer’s disease.

Drink coffee daily. It’s a potent anti-oxidant and mood elevator. Make your kitchen a café where you treat yourself to coffee or visit a café for people-watching when you feel lonely.

Get sleep. If you don’t sleep through the night, take a mid-day siesta! Sleep deprivation can perpetuate stress. You will wake up irritable, and anything could set you off.

Ultimately, stress management means preparing for life’s instabilities and setting aside time to revitalize.

Many consider stress-management to be about massage or aromatherapy; you can certainly do these pleasurable activities, but you need to focus first on the bigger picture—how to build immunity to external pressures. In other words, control the small stressors that accumulate and erode you, and rehearse life strategies to envision a positive outcome the same way an athlete does before a competition.

Stress will always land on your doorstep, but you don’t have to constantly open the door! People-pleasing comes at a great personal cost. You can say no when you don’t want to do something or are too fatigued. If life gives you lemons, you don’t have to make lemonade. Throw away the lemons.

As well, there is great productivity during rest—you come back better. Sustaining vital energy is all about creating balance in your life: work and rest. When something destructive happens in your life, whether it is a disease process or the loss of a job, house or a loved one, you need to restore the balance. I call this

“creative compensation.” Get involved in an activity that makes your heart sing, where you lose track of time like cooking, gardening, painting, dancing, writing or singing.

While you might not be able to deal with the big stressors in your life, just yet, you can begin to handle the little ones. Small steps, giant gains. When you understand that life is a series of recoveries, you are not shocked and incapacitated. You set up during the good times to have a reflex action during the hard times. Learn from your previous experiences in which you survived adversity. Don’t focus on uncertainty, focus on your strengths. Pull out the qualities within that brought you success and recall them back to life to harness your power.

DEBBIE MANDEL of Lawrence, NY is a stress management expert and the author of “Addicted to Stress: A Woman’s 7 Step Program to Reclaim Joy and Spontaneity in Life.” When she wrote the book, Mandel says she was a recovering “stress junkie”—using an endless to-do list as an excuse to avoid dealing with sadness stemming from the experience of both of her parents having Alzheimer’s disease. She is the host of a weekly show, “Turn on Your Inner Light,” on radio station WGBB-AM (1240) in New York, produces a wellness newsletter and has been featured regularly in the media (www.turnonyourinnerlight.com).



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PARTY ON!

The Socialization Factor in Healthy Aging

WRITTEN BY **KATHY LAURENHUE**



few decades ago, Barbra Streisand became famous singing, “People who need people are the luckiest people in the world,” but the reality is, we all need people, and research studies increasingly prove it.

When various experts are asked, “How can I age well?” the standard responses nowadays are almost universally: exercise your body and brain, eat a healthy diet, get enough sleep, cultivate a positive attitude, tune in to your spiritual side—and socialize with friends. In fact, the importance of socialization is increasingly grabbing attention, and may be as critical to longevity as giving up smoking and other unhealthy habits.

Consider these findings:

- A landmark UCLA study found that the “fight or flight” response that has long been accepted as the normal reaction to stress is generally a male response. Women are more likely to “tend and befriend,” and this

alternative may be a contributing factor to their longer life expectancy.

- Research has shown that people with regular social ties are significantly less likely to demonstrate cognitive decline when compared to those who are lonely or isolated.
- University of Michigan researchers who tested 3,610 people between the ages of 24 and 96 found that even 10 minutes of social interaction improved cognitive performance.

Avoiding isolation is especially important for caregivers whose stress levels often feed physical and mental ailments. As well-said by one former caregiver, Juanita Tucker: “Each of us needs time for self, for friends, for fun, for recreation. Fulfilling these needs will not take away from our loved ones. Indeed, it will nourish and enrich us, and enable us to give more.”

So if people need people for healthy aging, how can we nurture those relationships?

Here are a few ideas:

Make physical exercise a group exercise. Taking a daily walk is good for your body and brain, and taking a walk with a friend may compound your sense of well-being. It is much easier to get your daily exercise if you do something you enjoy with someone you enjoy. Walk, swim, play croquet or bowl—whatever floats your boat. If you can't get out due to weather or disability, electronic games such as Wii cleverly offer the opportunity to play old favorite sports in the comfort of home—and with companions.

Put multiple minds together for brain aerobics. Doing crossword puzzles or Sudoku is generally a solitary effort, but lots of brain-building activities can be done with others. Board games like Scrabble, Upwords, Trivial Pursuit and Smart Mouth, for example, are fun precisely because they involve combining the power of multiple minds. In residential care settings, trivia quizzes, word games, reminiscence discussions and other daily events are effective group activities because one person's response may trigger another person's insight, thereby enriching the overall effect.

Share a meal. Eating a healthy diet is important, and, yet, perhaps the greatest aid to digestion is the company of others. What's that? You live alone? Invite a friend to lunch if you can. At the same time, technology allows people who are far away to share a meal by using inexpensive computer Webcams. I watch you eat while you watch me eat, and we both enjoy the conversation. If you aren't yet proficient with technology, you can do a non-visual version with telephones.

Enroll in a special interest group. What's your favorite thing to do? How can you share with others the enjoyment of doing it? Groups abound for virtually every interest, whether it's playing bridge or ballroom dancing. Even if the normally solitary act of reading a book is your way of relaxing, consider joining a book club to share thoughts and socialize. Also contemplate not just what you enjoy, but what you need. Many people find that a support group for those affected by Alzheimer's disease, for example, provides the unique camaraderie of people who truly understand.

Join an online group. If it's difficult to get out and about because you live in a rural area, have health problems of your own or are caring for a loved one, the virtual world can open endless new opportunities. Here, too, more and more special interests can be accommodated, from Alzheimer's disease-related chat rooms to Web sites that enable you to play Scrabble and other games with long-distance partners to your heart's

content. If you're not computer savvy, come of age by taking a class or connecting with someone like a grandchild or teenage neighbor who knows how to navigate the Web.

Be a friend. Consider the quote by the late radio host Bernard Meltzer: "A true friend is someone who thinks that you are a good egg even though he knows that you are slightly cracked." What we love about our friends is that they accept us as we are. They listen without judging. Anyone can learn to do that. Reach out. Sometimes all it takes is a simple invitation: "Come sit by me; I'd like to get to know you better."

Volunteer. It's possible to overcome your own troubles by helping others with their problems. One terrific way to make new friends is to volunteer for a cause you believe in.

In pondering socialization opportunities, remember to focus on what replenishes your spirit, not drains it. If a social activity adds to your stress, bow out. This advice also applies to people. Not all relationships are created equal. Wooden people who try to whittle others down can literally whittle down your health as well.

In reality, we can't avoid all negative people, and we can't always have the social interactions we might choose, but we can reframe our thinking. A nursing home resident can say, "Poor me; I'm surrounded by 50 sick, crabby people," or he or she can say, "I am surrounded by 50 people I know nothing about. I bet each one has an interesting story to tell and would like me to be a willing listener."

Socialization gives us a sense of belonging, of being part of a community—even if it's a community of only three or four people. With community comes confidence: By this group I am valued; what I do with this group gives my life meaning. With confidence comes self-esteem and an increased sense of well-being.

But the greatest benefit of socialization is that people who share experiences are much more likely to laugh together, and laughter may be the best boon to longevity we have. So party on!

KATHY LAURENHUE of Lakewood Ranch, FL writes "Brain Aerobics Weekly," which provides printable brain teasers (www.brinaerobicsweekly.com), and a monthly newsletter on dementia (www.wisernowalz.com). She is also the author of "Getting to Know the Life Stories of Older Adults," as well as a lecturer, curriculum developer and trainer.

Get Motivated and Get Moving!

Even those of us with the best of intentions to stick to a strict exercise routine fall off the bike, elliptical, treadmill or whatever every now and then. But the extreme value of regular exercise and physical activity, especially as we age, makes it critical to pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off and get moving again. So if your New Year's resolution to shape up gets stalled, what can you do for extra motivation?

Take These Steps:

- 1.** Ask someone to be your exercise buddy. Many older adults agree that having someone to exercise with helps keep them going.
- 2.** Listen to recorded books or music while you do endurance activities.
- 3.** Set a goal, and decide on a reward you will get when you reach it.
- 4.** Give yourself physical activity homework assignments for the next day or the next week.
- 5.** Think of your exercise sessions as appointments, and mark them on your calendar.
- 6.** Keep a record of what you do and of your progress. Understand that there will be times that you don't show rapid progress and that you are still benefiting from your activities during those times.
- 7.** Plan ahead for travel, bad weather and house guests. For example, an exercise video can help you exercise indoors when the weather is bad.

Contributed by the **NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON AGING**, a branch of the National Institutes of Health. The above steps are reprinted from "Exercise: A Guide from the National Institute on Aging." **DETAILS** www.nia.nih.gov **800.222.2225**





Take Care of Yourself

**Caring for your loved one takes lots of time.
And finding leftover time for you is probably hard.
*But both are important.****

Soak in a bubble bath. Go for a walk. **Call AFA's toll-free hot line.** Get a check-up. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables. **Log on to AFA's Web site.** See your granddaughter's school play. Do a crossword puzzle. **Join a caregiver support group.** Visit a museum. Sign up for a dance class. **Call into the Care Connection telephone support network.** Take vitamins. Meet a friend for lunch. **Read care *AD*vantage.** Listen to music. Be positive. **Check out community resources.** Put up your feet. Ask for help.

**Studies show caregivers of loved ones with dementia spend an average 85 hours per week on caregiving; "finding time for oneself" is an unmet need; and caregiving can affect mental and physical well-being.*

FOR HELP... Contact AFA for counseling and to learn more about support groups, Care Connection, care *AD*vantage and community resources.

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