

Datestamp: 07/09/2007

Finding your fountain of youth

By Juliana Goodwin

News-Leader

Silver-haired Lucille Cook tapped her white dance shoe and then twisted her hips.

The 85-year-old slid across the floor to the upbeat country lyrics: "My baby likes to rock it like a boogie woogie choo choo train."

Dancing keeps her healthy and feeling young, Cook said.

"I thank God I can do what I do," she said.

While no one can stop time, there are ways to keep yourself feeling young. Keeping yourself youthful means working on your physical, mental and spiritual health.

Keep your body active

Dance instructor Kelly Frey teaches line dancing to seniors at Northview Senior Center.

She said the benefits of the activity are threefold: "One, it's a social outlet. Two, it's great exercise, and three, it keeps their mind exercised. We have steps and patterns so we have to memorize as they go," Frey said.

After her husband died, Retha Doyle took up line dancing and said it's saved her life. The 86-year-old boasted that she only goes to the doctor once a year.

It's a mental challenge as well as a physical challenge, said Lora Rogers, 84.

"Every dance is a different routine, so it's really good for your brain," echoed Iona Carroll.

Barbara Dean, 67, loves the exercise.

"I feel great. It makes me feel good. I get out of here and I'm pepped up," she said.

People who stay active as they get older tend to be in the hospital less and their quality of life is better, said Kimberly Jacobs, exercise physiologist with St. John's Hammons Heart Institute.

Once muscle weakness starts, the quality of life can deteriorate for seniors.

"They respond by doing less and less, and as they do less, they get weaker, and it's a vicious cycle," Jacobs said.

People who exercise regularly heal faster after surgery or an injury. Exercise helps their mental outlook, too, Jacobs said. She recommends walking, using a stationary bike or lifting weights to help with range of motion

and muscle strength.

Eat an age-busting diet

But exercise is only part of the physical picture; the body needs fuel as well.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, a brain-healthy diet is one that reduces the risk of heart disease and diabetes. It also encourages blood flow to the brain and is low in fat and cholesterol.

It includes cold water fish that contain beneficial omega-3 fatty acids: halibut, mackerel, salmon, trout and tuna.

As people age, they usually need to decrease their calorie intake because they aren't as active, said Daphne Smith, dietician with St. John's Hammons Heart Institute.

That means they also have a smaller calorie window to get their nutrients.

When it comes to fats, eat "healthy fats such as olive oil, flaxseed, avocado — most nuts are beneficial, too," Smith said.

Smith recommends eating "power foods" loaded with antioxidants. These are foods with deep colors throughout the food, such as kale, spinach, brussels sprouts, alfalfa sprouts, broccoli, beets, red bell pepper, onion, corn, eggplant, prunes, raisins, berries, plums, oranges, red grapes and cherries.

And don't forget your calcium.

"If you don't have strong bone structure," Smith said, "you will be more susceptible to fractures and osteoporosis."

Give your brain a workout

Exercise for your mind is necessary to ward off the signs of old age.

"One of the key ingredients to prevent Alzheimer's symptoms is to learn new things, whether by dancing or taking on a course at a university. Constantly challenge (the mind) with new information," said Wanda Holloway, a counselor and licensed clinical social worker with Burrell Behavioral Health, a CoxHealth affiliate.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, low levels of education are associated with higher risk of developing Alzheimer's, possibly because of the lower level of life-long mental stimulation.

To stimulate your brain, Holloway recommends these activities:

- Get on the computer and research a new country every week. Learn about its culture, currency and where it is located.
- Travel somewhere new.
- Play cards and other games.
- Tackle crossword puzzles.

- Learn a new skill, such as crocheting, knitting, etc.
- Take a class in cooking, art, decorating or crafts.
- Read more.
- Take advantage of any free class you can find, even if you will not use the skill. For example, home improvement stores may offer painting classes. Learn to paint — whether or not you plan to redecorate.

How sharp our mind will be is contingent on how much we use it, Holloway said. "If we are sitting doing the same thing every day, we are not going to be challenged."

And don't forget to socialize. Socializing is important to our physical, mental and spiritual health, which are all intertwined, Holloway said.

People who do not interact with others can become lonely. Loneliness can lead to depression, which can lead to declining health, she said.

'You gotta get out with people'

Experts say people who neglect the spiritual and mental aspects of their life often suffer from physical ailments.

For optimum emotional health, people need companionship and interaction. Seniors can benefit from having a pet or from volunteering, Holloway said.

Margaret Geiger coordinates the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program at Council of Churches of the Ozarks, known as R.S.V.P. The organization has volunteers in their 90s. Geiger said volunteering gives seniors a purpose.

"It keeps them active. They stay healthier longer," Geiger said. "I think that is why a lot of our older volunteers have been doing it so long and why they are still doing it."

The opportunities at R.S.V.P. are endless, from clerical work to stuffing envelopes to helping out at a hospital. Even seniors who can't drive can still volunteer. The organization has volunteers who pick up others who want to help, she said.

Joyce Wallace of Strafford says interaction is the key to feeling young for her. She volunteers her time to mentally challenged children and hangs out at Northview Senior Center in Springfield.

"It beats sitting in the house looking at four walls. You get old that way. You gotta get out with people and you forget your age," said Wallace, 66.

Volunteering often puts your own problems into perspective, Holloway said.

Dean, Cook, Doyle, Rogers and several other ladies are in their own dance troupe and volunteer at nursing homes. They perform dances for other seniors and say they love to see the joy it brings.

One performer, Catherine Oaks, 86, said she loves "being where the action is. My brain feels 20."

Another factor in maintaining health is to surround yourself with young people, or people who are young at heart — those with a positive outlook.

"We are the company we keep," Holloway said. "That's a good thing to remember."

Want to volunteer?

If you're interested in volunteering with the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program, contact Margaret Geiger at 862-3595.

Look young by protecting your skin

Feeling young is great, but so is looking young. Here are some tips from Web MD for protecting your skin as you age.

- If you're a woman who wears makeup, be sure to remove all traces of cosmetics at the end of the day.
 - Drink plenty of water — this provides your skin with vital moisture from the inside.
 - Start early. Start a proper skin-care routine while you are young.
 - Seek professional help for stubborn skin problems. Skin's not going to be perfect. It can be dry or oily; it can develop rashes and acne. Address the problem with a professional skin expert, from a skin aesthetician at a spa to a dermatologist for more severe skin problems.
 - Avoid the sun between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.
 - Wear wide-brimmed hats, long-sleeved shirts and pants when you are going out in the sun.
 - Use a generous amount of sunscreen and reapply it every two to three hours.
 - Use sunscreens that have a sun protection factor greater than 15 and that have UVA and UVB coverage
 - Avoid tanning beds.
- Source: www.webmd.com

Brain teasers

Brain teasers are one way to challenge your brain and keep it active.

Here are three exercises suggested in "The Memory Prescription" by Dr. Gary Small:

1. Make three words from the following jumble of letters. R E H T E D O S W R
2. Jim is twice as old as his brother Jeff. Ten years later, however, Jeff has caught up and is now two-thirds his brother's age. How can that be?
3. Change one letter at a time in the word SELL until you have the word FAIR. Each change must spell a proper word.

SELL _____ FAIR

ANSWERS

1. Either THREE WORDS or THE RED ROWS.
2. When Jim was 20 years old and Jeff was 10, Jim was twice his brother's age. Ten years later, Jim reached his 30th birthday and Jeff his 20th, so Jeff's age was two-thirds his brother's.
3. SELL, FELL, FALL, FAIL, FAIR