

SeniorHOTLINE

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Senior Series

A partnership between
Ohio State University Extension and
Ohio Aging Network professionals



Sleep Sense

active aging



When was the last time you had a "good night's sleep"? While sleep patterns change as we age, disturbed sleep and waking up tired every day is not a normal part of aging. Changes in lifestyle and behaviors may

be a factor, such as the addition of daytime naps. Poor sleep habits may have become entrenched; you may associate your bed with television or reading, not sleeping; and the silence of your bedroom and/or common noises may trouble you more than when you were younger. Also, stress and bereavement may lead to early awakenings or interrupted sleep.

Medical/psychiatric conditions and the physical changes associated with aging may play a role too. Falling asleep may take longer or be interrupted due to nighttime aches and pains. The number of middle-aged and elderly people suffering from at least four sleep disorders is far greater than younger people: sleep apnea, restless legs syndrome, periodic limb movements disorder, and advanced sleep phase syndrome. The good news is that these are treatable conditions. Medical problems including arthritis, heartburn, osteoporosis, and heart and lung disease may also interrupt, delay, or abbreviate sleep, as may some drugs used to treat these conditions. The need to use the bathroom more frequently may make nighttime risings common. Psychiatric conditions including depression and anxiety may also lead to sleep difficulties.

How do you reclaim your sleep life? If sleep problems persist for longer than a week and are bother-

some, or if sleepiness interferes with the way you feel or function during the day, a doctor's help may be needed. To get the most out of your "sleep talk" with your health care provider, keep a diary of your sleep habits for about ten days. Identifying just how much sleep you're getting over a period of time and other lifestyle sleep habits help document your problem in a way that your physician can best understand.

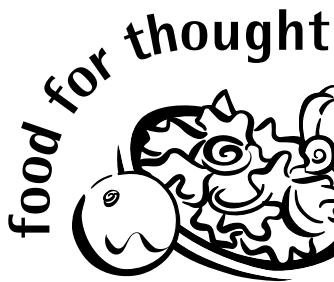
The National Institute on Aging provides the following suggestions to improve lifestyle sleep patterns.

- Go to sleep and rise the same time every day.
- Take short naps after lunch and exercise moderately in the afternoon.
- Drink a small amount of a warm, non-caffeinated beverage just before going to bed.
- Create a safe and comfortable place to sleep. Darken and cool the room, adding soft background sounds or music. Use the bedroom only for sleeping.
- Try not to worry about sleep.
- Find out if prescription medications keep you from sleeping, and if so, talk with your doctor about changing prescriptions.

By Kathy Oliver, Extension Educator, Family and Consumer Sciences, Ohio State University Extension, Hardin County.

Sources: National Sleep Foundation (2002). When You Can't Sleep: The ABCs of ZZZs and Sleep and Aging. Retrieved 5/21/04 from <http://www.sleepfoundation.org/publications/ZZZs.cfm> and <http://www.sleepfoundation.org/publications/sleepage.cfm>; Benavente, J. (May, 2004). Getting Your Zzzzzs. Colorado State University Cooperative Extension. Retrieved 5/12/04 from <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/columnha/ha04052.html>

Dietary Supplements: Is More Better?



Should you take a dietary supplement? What's the best way to get the vitamins and minerals you need? Current surveys show that approximately 60 to 70 percent of adults ages 51 to 70 use vitamin and/or mineral supplements. Is this the best way to get the nutrients your body needs?

Nutritionists and health professionals encourage consumers to get the vitamins and minerals they need through a nutritionally balanced diet. Following the USDA's Food Guide Pyramid is the best way to get nutrients found naturally in food. However, there are circumstances when you should consider taking a dietary supplement. Taking a supplement may be appropriate if you smoke or drink alcohol in excess, if you are a postmenopausal woman, if you are on a low-calorie diet, or if you don't eat well. Even if you eat a balanced diet, if you are over 50, you may need certain vitamins and minerals. Many older adults don't get adequate amounts or have trouble absorbing vitamin B12, calcium, vitamin D, iron, and vitamin B6. Talk to your physician or a registered dietitian to discuss your specific needs.

If you are considering taking a dietary supplement, follow these guidelines:

- Talk to your physician or a registered dietitian. Not everyone reacts the same way to certain substances.
- Learn about the supplement that you are taking. Be sure to get information from reliable places, such as pharmacy, medical, dietetic, university, or government sources.
- Purchase brands from companies you know are reputable. Generally store or generic brands are fine.
- The supplement doesn't need to be a "senior" formula.
- If you decide to take a supplement without a health professional's advice, tell them anyway. They can monitor any other medications you are taking that may interfere with a supplement.
- Remember that many health claims made about supplements may not be based on scientific research.

By Jennifer Even, Extension Educator, Family and Consumer Sciences, Ohio State University Extension, Hamilton County.

Sources: National Institute on Aging, "Dietary Supplements: More is Not Always Better." Food and Drug Administration; National Institutes of Health; Department of Agriculture.



"It's Never Too Late to Plant a Tree: Your Guide to Never Retiring"

by Mel Helitzer and Morrie
Helitzer (2003 by University
Sports Press, Athens, OH)

In his foreword to *It's Never Too Late to Plant a Tree: Your Guide to Never Retiring*, Edgar M. Bronfman (author of *The Third Act*) stresses the importance of "retiring to something." He suggests that following a retirement plan can make an average life into an extraordinary one.

Sixty-five "ordinary" men and women who are making a positive difference during their retirement years tell their stories in this book by Mel and Morrie Helitzer. Each story and project differs but the qualities of passion and determination are a common theme.

One man bought a run-down old farm at the age of 62. Thirty years later, it is a thriving nature preserve. Local youth groups visit to learn about conservation. A 90-year-old Canadian woman spearheads a neighborhood watch project, slowly removing prostitutes and drug dealers from her community.

After reading this book, I'm ready to start "planting"!

By Joyce J. Brown, Extension Educator, Family and Consumer Sciences, Ohio State University Extension, Athens County.

Meet Agnes



Working in the social service sector gives me so many wonderful opportunities. Perhaps

the best of these is the opportunity to meet some of the most amazing people in Ohio. I met one such amazing person in August of 2000. My appointment calendar mentioned the particulars of her situation—Agnes, 70 years young, legally blind, needs to receive dialysis treatments three times a week.

Agnes was in a tough and urgent situation. The reality was

(and still is) that Agnes is a remarkable woman with the gift of handling even the most difficult situations in the most positive ways. Her concerns were for future what-ifs and what could she do to help herself as things changed. She agreed to a delivery of a few low-vision products and we also came up with a back-up plan for dialysis transportation, if needed.

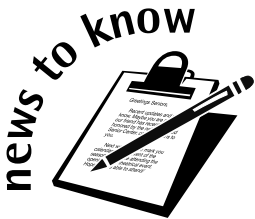
During the visit, she shared her family story and her community involvement. She shared how she kept herself feeling productive as opposed to focusing on what she wasn't able to

do. And most importantly, I saw firsthand how she looked at everything in a positive light!

Since meeting Agnes three years ago, she has called many times to say hello and share a thank you. On the flip side, in calling Agnes I have often been selfish, knowing that her voice and eternal optimism would uplift my spirits. In my own tough situations, I have asked myself, how would Agnes react? I have shared her positive outlook with others hoping she will inspire them as she has me.

By Karen Puterbaugh, Director, Greene County Council on Aging.

The "Big A"—Understanding Alzheimer's Disease



With the recent death of President Ronald Reagan, we have been reminded that Alzheimer's disease knows no boundaries, affecting over 4 million Americans. By the middle of this century an estimated

14 million Americans will be diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

What Is Alzheimer's Disease?

Alzheimer's is a progressive brain disorder that gradually destroys a person's memory, as well as the ability to learn, reason, make judgments, communicate, and carry out daily activities. While Alzheimer's disease is the leading cause of dementia, it is important to note that there are many others, including brain injury, vascular dementia, and Parkinson's disease.

Some memory changes are normal as we age, but symptoms of Alzheimer's disease are more than simple lapses of memory. According to the Alzheimer's Association, it is critical that people with demen-

tia and their families receive information, care, and support as early as possible. The Alzheimer's Association has developed the following list of common warning signs:

1. Memory loss
2. Difficulty performing familiar tasks
3. Problems with language
4. Disorientation to time and place
5. Poor or decreased judgment
6. Problems with abstract thinking
7. Misplacing things
8. Changes in mood or behavior
9. Changes in personality
10. Loss of initiative

Early diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or other causes of dementia is an important step in getting appropriate treatment, care, and support. To contact the Alzheimer's Association chapter in your area or to learn more, call 1-800-441-3322 or log on to www.alz.org.

By Patricia L. Scott, Special Projects, Franklin County Office on Aging.

Friendships Through the Years



Friends are very important. Friends are the people we often turn to in times of crisis. Our mobile society has placed many of us farther away from our birth families so in fact our friends sometimes act as surrogate family. The beauty of friendship is that it has many

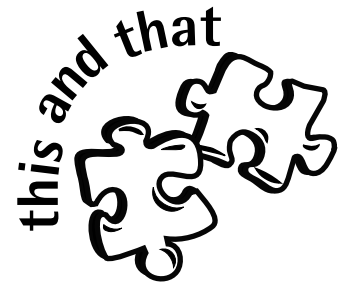
positive social, emotional, and physical benefits. The research suggests that people with close relationships who interacted daily with friends, eat better, sleep better, and are more apt to take their prescribed medicine, are reminded to go for checkups, and generally take good care of their health. Medical professionals even suggest that friendship helps the body's autoimmune system resist disease. Being able to confide in a close friend can help reduce the strain of life's daily hassles.

Shea, Thompson, and Blieszner (1988) suggest that being a friend is a role that can continue throughout life, even if other important roles, such as spouse, parent, or worker, change. In fact, because of changes in those other relationships, the value of friends may actually increase in old age. It is interesting to note that typically men have fewer friends on average than women. Women's friendships tend to stress intimacy and revealing how they feel, while men tend to participate in activities together and have less intimacy in terms of shared feelings.

Friendships in later life are probably more important than at any other stage of life. One of three women and one of every seven men age 65 or older lives alone. Lack of marital companionship often is the impetus for an older adult to reach out to friends for the human contact they need. Later life transitions, such as retirement, loss of spouse, and health problems, can be very isolating. As the quote from HG Bohn states, "Friendships multiply joys and divide griefs." The beauty of friendship is the opportunity to share both good times and bad and to grow together over the years and through shared experiences. The word of wisdom is take time to cultivate these special relationships. The benefits are innumerable. Coffee anyone?

By Lynn Dobb, Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging.

Sources: Blieszner, Rosemary. (2001). "She'll Be on My Heart": Intimacy Among Friends Generations Summer 2001 Intimacy and Aging 48-54; D. Wayne Matthews. (1993). The Magic of Friendship. North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service Electronic Publication Number FCS2911.



On Sunshine

Sunshine...

warm

and

bright

Sunshine...

Feel

your

light

Sunshine...

It

makes

everything

all right!

By Lynn Dobb, Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging.

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Address editorial comments to:
Senior Hotline Newsletter
151 Campbell Hall, 1787 Neil Avenue
Columbus, OH 43210-1295
e-mail: hdfsext@hec.osu.edu

Issue Editors:

Kathy Oliver, Extension Educator, Family and Consumer Sciences,
Ohio State University Extension, Hardin County

Karen Puterbaugh, Director, Greene County Office on Aging

Christine A. Price, Ohio State University Extension State Gerontology Specialist

Kirk Bloir, Ohio State University Extension Associate, Human Development and Family Science

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