

WESTMORELAND COUNTY

AREA AGENCY ON AGING

INSIDE LINE

MARCH/APRIL 2008

LIVE FOR TODAY

If you were told you only had months to live, what would you do differently? Would you finally buy that ticket to Hawaii or spend more time with your loved ones? The good news is you don't have to have a brush with death to realize what matters most. Here are some tips to make the most out of your life.

- **Slow Down.** Don't feel the need to be the "Energizer Bunny". Cut back on projects and tasks that are not important to you. Also, turn off the television and connect with family and friends instead. Make time for pleasurable things, such as a leisurely lunch with your spouse.
- **Live Healthier.** Watch what you put into your body and make fitness a part of your lifestyle. Our bodies are temples, and we should treat them with reverence.

- **Go For It.** Achieve what you want by setting specific goals and focus on those goals by using your time effectively.
- **Help Others.** Most people want to volunteer but do not want something difficult or time consuming. A good way to start is to do something you already enjoy. Like knitting? Make a blanket for a sick child and donate it. Green thumb? Beautify your local park by picking up trash and planting some flowers. If you are still unsure of how to help, check out www.volunteermatch.org.
- **See The World.** Experiencing new people and places brings joy and wonder. Take your dream vacation or travel closer to home, either one can infuse you with a sense of adventure.
- **Forgive.** You are only hurting yourself by staying resentful. Try practicing forgiveness in small ways first, like; forgiving the person who is late again or the car that cuts you off. Also, make a gratitude list, so that you can pay attention to all the good in your life.
- **Let Go.** You are fine the way you are. You don't have to be a perfectionist at everything. Love yourself, it is the most healing thing you can ever do.

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Macular degeneration is a condition of the eye that is often related to aging. It is commonly referred to as age-related macular degeneration, and is abbreviated as AMD. While its cause is unknown, the early or late state of AMD affects about 8.5 million Americans over the age of

40. The late stage, associated with vision loss, is the most common cause of legal blindness in people over the age of 50.

In AMD, the macula of the eye is affected. The macula is located at the center of the retina, a light-sensitive tissue which lines the back of the eye. The retina receives images of external objects, then sends them as impulses to the brain. The macula provides us with central vision and allows us to see fine detail, such as recognizing a face, reading, or watching television. When the macula becomes damaged, extreme and dramatic vision loss can occur.

The early stages of AMD typically start with the appearance of spots beneath the retina. These spots, called drusen, are small, round lesions which usually do not change vision very much. Most people with drusen will never have a serious loss of vision. However, certain changes can develop that lead to the late stage of AMD. Most often vision loss starts in one eye. Because the healthy eye compensates for the loss of vision in the damaged eye, macular degeneration may initially go unnoticed.

The two forms of the late stages of AMD are known as dry and wet AMD. When the early stage drusen are present for a long time, they cause the macula to become thinner and stop functioning. This is referred

to as the dry form of AMD. This may cause some people to detect "blank" areas in their central vision. While there are no treatments and no preventive measures currently available for people with dry AMD, various vision aids, including magnifiers, are available to help these people continue to live their lives as normally as possible. However, eyes with drusen or dry AMD can progress into wet AMD.

The wet form of AMD is responsible for up to 90% of the severe vision loss associated with this condition. Wet AMD is caused by the growth of abnormal blood vessels across the macula and beneath the retina. As these abnormal vessels leak fluid and blood into the tissue at the back of the eye, scar tissue typically forms and loss of vision may occur. In the early stages of wet AMD, a person's vision may become blurred or distorted. The eye provider should then conduct the appropriate diagnostic exams to test the person's visual function and assess the health of the retina.

There are two treatments available for patients with wet AMD. One of these is laser photocoagulation. While this process usually cannot restore lost vision, it seals leaky blood vessels and inhibits their growth in selected cases. This prevents further vision deterioration in a small

percentage of wet AMD cases. Another treatment for wet AMD is Visudyne therapy. In this procedure, a light-activated drug known as Visudyne is injected into the patient's bloodstream. Once the drug reaches the retina, it is activated by a non-thermal laser (a laser that does not burn the retina). This produces a clot that closes the abnormal vessels without causing damage to the overlying sensory retina. The abnormal blood vessels may return after several months. However, Visudyne therapy can be reapplied.

Only an eye care professional can diagnose wet AMD. Everyone over the age of 40 should have regular medical eye exams performed by an eye care professional. Because AMD has a hereditary component, the American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends that persons over 40 who have relatives with AMD should have a retinal exam every two years. Please see your eye care provider if you suspect you may be at risk.

EARTH DAY

Earth Day is April 22, 2008 and consumers are being encouraged to make a change by choosing eco-friendly organic foods, switching to an energy efficient light bulb or planting a tree. For other ideas go to www.earthday.net.

**NEW PRESCRIPTION
DISCOUNT CARD
COMING MARCH 1, 2008**

Americans are paying more for prescription drugs than ever before. Without prescription coverage, staying healthy can come at a high price. With the Westmoreland County Prescription Discount Card provided to you in a joint effort with the National Association of Counties (NACo), you can save money on many of your prescription purchases!

Any county resident without prescription coverage can use this program. Even if you have insurance for prescription drugs, you may still benefit from the discount card since it may save you money on prescription drugs your existing plan does not cover. All medications are covered except for over-the-counter products.

This plan is not insurance; it is a prescription discount program. The card provides immediate discounts at the pharmacy. Upon presenting your card to the pharmacist, you will pay the lowest price; whether it is from the discount card or the pharmacy's regular retail price.

All Westmoreland County residents are eligible for the free discount card!

- No income requirements
- No age requirements

- Unlimited use for the whole family
The Westmoreland County Prescription Discount card is:

- **Valuable.** Save an average of 20% off the pharmacy's regular price on all commonly prescribed prescriptions and an average savings of 50% on 90-day supplies of select generics through mail service.
- **Easy.** There are no claim forms to fill out and no annual fee to pay.
- **Convenient.** More than 59,000 participating pharmacies nationwide and 95 are right here in Westmoreland County! Go to www.naco.org for a listing.

The discount cards will be available March 1, 2008 by calling the County Helpline toll-free at 1-800-222-8848. Additional information is available on-line through the Westmoreland County homepage at www.co.westmoreland.pa.us/rxcard and Caremark Rx, Inc. at www.caremark.com/naco, whom administers the discount card program.

**MARCH 24–31 IS
NATIONAL SLEEP
AWARENESS WEEK**

It is only during sleep that the brain and nervous system can rest and rebuild. And good quality sleep is vital for learning and the memory. But many older adults have difficulty getting to sleep . . . or they wake up too early, or too often. How much do you know about sleep? What you don't know can keep you from getting enough sleep – and the right kind. Take this true/false quiz and check your answers below.

1. Sleep problems are inevitable as we get older.
2. There are different kinds of sleep.
3. Sleeping pills are the best treatment for sleep problems.
4. A nice cup of hot cocoa can help you get to sleep.
5. Exercise is one of the best ways to fight insomnia.
6. The worst thing about snoring is that it keeps your sleep partner awake.
7. Weight loss can improve sleep quality.
8. Older adults need just as much sleep as do younger adults.
9. Warm milk or a bedtime snack can help you sleep.
10. Sleep is still a mysterious subject for science.

Answers to "Test Your Sleep IQ":

1. **False.** Age-related changes contribute to the inability to get a good night's sleep – but much can be done to help older adults get a better night's sleep. Speak to your doctor.
2. **True.** Sleep cycle disorders may mean that even if you are getting as many hours of sleep as you need, you still will not feel rested.
3. **False.** Sleep medications can be helpful, but medication can actually interfere with normal sleep. Sleeping pills should normally be used only short-term, and should not be considered a solution to sleeplessness.
4. **False.** Though you probably know not to drink coffee or caffeinated colas near bedtime, don't forget that chocolate contains caffeine also.
5. **True.** Exercise during the day is good for sleep at night. However, avoid working out near bedtime, which can have the opposite effect.
6. **False.** Snoring can be a sign of a serious disorder called sleep

apnea, a condition in which a person repeatedly stops breathing for 10 to 30 seconds at a time. This decreases oxygen to the body and can cause repeated waking.

7. **True.** Obesity makes it more likely that a person will have sleep apnea and the opposite is true too; a lack of sleep can actually increase the likelihood of obesity.
8. **True.** While we often experience more insomnia and other sleep disorders as we age due to illness, pain, frequent urination and certain medications, we still need as many hours of sleep as we did when we were younger.
9. **True.** But only a light snack. Heavy meals late in the evening can keep you awake.
10. **True . . . and False!** Though there are many aspects of sleep that we don't yet understand, recent research has uncovered much information about sleep – *the activity that consumes up to a third of our lives.*

MAINTAINING SOCIAL CONTACT

Remaining socially active is important as we age. Getting out and trying new and different activities can broaden your horizons. You might even find something you really enjoy doing and meet some great new friends in the process. There are endless possibilities to become active in your community.

Important Keys To Maintaining Social Contact:

- Set goals for each day to greet or talk to someone.
- Plan/schedule your day to include other people.
- Reach out to others by being a volunteer.
- Find a part-time job you enjoy.
- Use the internet to explore new areas.
- Email, write or visit family and friends.
- Join groups through church, senior centers, or the "Y".
- Call a person in need each day.

Programs To Join:

Senior Companion

Program: This program reaches out to older adults who need extra assistance to live independently in their own home or communities. Senior companions provide companionship, friendship, assist with simple chores, and transportation. The Friendly Visitor program

through the Westmoreland County AAA (1-800-442-8000) or the Faith in Action program (724-539-4357) are two contacts that need volunteers.

Generations In Touch:

Seniors offer emotional support, mentoring, and tutoring to children with special needs. For more information, call the Westmoreland County Children's Bureau at 724-830-3300, ext. 1.

RSVP: This program matches personal interests and skills of older adults with opportunities to help solve community problems. Please contact the Westmoreland County RSVP Coordinator, Amy Halula, at 1-800-262-2103, ext. 4213.

Your Local Senior Center:

Senior volunteers are needed to assist in the kitchens, greet and register the attendants and help with various senior center programs.

Your Local Church:

Volunteers are always needed to assist with Food Banks, transportation, cleaning, gardening, choir, Eucharistic ministers and lectors.

Recreation Activities:

Adult Education: Most schools and colleges offer opportunities to continue your education. There is often a reduced rate to attend classes.

Westmoreland County Senior Games:

The games, scheduled for May 6-16, 2008, provide a chance

to participate in an array of indoor/outdoor sporting events. For a registration booklet, call the Westmoreland County Bureau of Parks and Recreation at 724-830-3950.

Public Libraries: Libraries can provide many services. Large-print books, recordings, talking books, bookmobiles, and mail order delivery materials are some resources.

Senior Centers: The centers offer a wide array of social and recreational activities, such as lunches, exercises, billiards, crafts, bingo, cards and educational programs to name a few. Please contact the Westmoreland County Area Agency on Aging (1-800-442-8000) for a center near you.

**INSIDE LINE
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