

WESTMORELAND COUNTY

AREA AGENCY ON AGING

INSIDE LINE

MAY/JUNE 2009

HELP FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS

The Family Caregiver Support Program (FCSP) is designed to assist family and other adult primary caregivers of functionally dependent older persons, adult caregivers of cognitively-impaired adult relatives with dementia, and older relatives caring for young children.

The goal of the program is to support the primary caregiver and family in ways that are specific to their needs and preferences. Most expenditures will be considered for reimbursement if they can be justified as legitimate caregiving-related supplies, goods and/or services. It allows more options for respite care in order to meet individual needs to each consumer (i.e. hiring a neighbor or friend instead of having a stranger from an agency provide the service).

The Area Agency on Aging staff will assess the needs of families taking care of relatives. Depending on the outcome of the

assessment determining level of need, the family qualification and the annual income of the household, family caregivers may receive up to \$200 to \$300 a month to help purchase services such as respite care, adult day care, homemaker services, and more; or to purchase caregiving supplies such as disposable briefs or medical equipment and supplies not covered by third-party payers.

Another service available through the FCSP is a monthly Caregiver Support Group Meeting, which is open to the public but most importantly available to family caregivers to discuss their concerns, share their experiences and gain support and information from other caregivers.

These meetings are held in the first floor conference room at the Westmoreland County Area Agency on Aging in the Historic Troutman Building, 200 South Main Street, Greensburg, PA. They are scheduled either the second or third Wednesday of each

month from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. The tentative schedule for these meetings for the remainder of the year is as follows:

- May 13, 2009
- June 10, 2009
- July 15, 2009
- August 12, 2009
- September 16, 2009
- October 14, 2009
- November 18, 2009
- December 9, 2009

At some meetings, guest speakers are featured who discuss various topics that are of interest to caregivers. For more information concerning the Caregiver Support Group Meetings or the Family Caregiver Support Program, please call the Westmoreland County Area Agency on Aging at 724-830-4444 or 1-800-442-8000.

SOOTHING THE STING OF SHINGLES

by The National Institutes of Health

It's an unpleasant part of childhood you can never really leave behind. Even when chickenpox is gone, the virus that causes it stays

with you for life, hidden and inactive in your nerve cells. As you get older, the virus may make a second, unwelcome appearance and cause a painful disease called shingles. The second time around can be far more complicated and miserable than the first.

Once you've had chickenpox, caused by the varicella-zoster virus, you're unlikely to get it again, thanks to your immune system. But as you get older, the virus may re-emerge and cause shingles, also known as herpes zoster. Shingles can strike at any age, but it usually affects adults after age 50. Each year more than 1 million Americans get shingles or its complications.

The most obvious symptom of shingles is a painful, itchy red rash with fluid-filled blisters, which generally appear on just one side of the body or face. The rash looks similar to chickenpox and can last from 3 to 5 weeks. After the rash fades, the pain sometimes persists for months or years. This lingering nerve pain, called post-herpetic neuralgia, affects nearly 1 out of every 3 older people with shingles. The pain can be so severe that even the gentlest touch or breeze can feel excruciating.

It's impossible to "catch" shingles from someone else. But a person with an active shingles rash can pass the varicella-zoster virus to someone who's

never had chickenpox or a chickenpox vaccine. If that happens, the other person would get chickenpox, not shingles.

Fortunately, a vaccine is available which may prevent shingles or greatly reduce the symptoms and the risk for post-herpetic neuralgia. The Centers for Disease Control recommends that anyone aged 60 and older get the vaccine if they have a healthy immune system. Unfortunately, the vaccine is approximately \$200.00 and the costs are not always covered by health insurance. If you're considering it, be sure to talk with your doctor and check with your insurance provider about coverage.

THE SILENT KILLER

If you have high blood pressure (also known as hypertension), it means your heart must pump harder to circulate blood through your body, which puts your arteries under greater pressure. Uncontrolled high blood pressure is a major risk factor for stroke, heart disease and kidney disease, especially when combined with obesity, smoking, excessive drinking, high cholesterol or diabetes.

Hypertension is often called "the silent killer" because it usually has no symptoms. Nearly one-third of Americans with high blood pressure are undiagnosed. The only way to know if you have high blood pressure is

to have it checked. The recommended level is less than 120/80 mm Hg. A consistent reading of 140/90 mm Hg or higher is considered hypertension, while 120-139/80-89 mm Hg indicates pre-hypertension.

Some risk factors for high blood pressure can be controlled:

- Obesity
- High sodium intake
- Heavy alcohol consumption
- Lack of physical activity
- Stress: Stress hormones may increase heart rate and blood pressure temporarily. Stress can also lead to bad choices that impact blood pressure, such as overeating, drinking and smoking.

Other risk factors are genetic:

- Race: High blood pressure occurs more often, tends to begin at an earlier age and is usually more severe in African-Americans than in Caucasians.
- Family history
- Age: Men are most likely to develop high blood pressure between ages 35 and 55; women are more likely to develop it after menopause.

There is no cure for high blood pressure, but you can control it. For pre-hypertension, your doctor may ask you to lose weight, increase your physical

activity, follow a heart-healthy diet low in sodium (less than 2,400 mg a day), limit alcohol, quit smoking and reduce stress. If your blood pressure is above 140/90, your doctor will probably prescribe medication in addition to lifestyle changes.

If you would like to learn more go to the high blood pressure section of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's website at www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp.

DEALING WITH HEARING LOSS

By the National Institutes of Health

Hearing loss can be frustrating. It can make it hard to understand and follow a doctor's advice, to respond to warnings and to hear doorbells and alarms. Not being able to follow a conversation can also make you feel left out and alone. When many people talk at the same time, it's hard for those with hearing loss to understand what people are saying. But there are ways to treat hearing loss. The most common is to wear a hearing aid.

Hearing loss happens for many reasons. Some people lose their hearing slowly as they age. In fact, hearing loss is one of the most common conditions affecting older adults. Roughly 1 in 3 people between the ages of 65 and 74 and nearly half of those 75 and older have hearing

loss. Another reason may be exposure to too much loud noise. Many construction workers, farmers, musicians, airport workers, tree cutters and people in the armed forces have noise-induced hearing loss. Hearing loss can also be caused by ear infections, heart conditions or stroke, head injuries, tumors and certain medications.

If you answer "yes" to 3 or more of the questions below, consult with your doctor.

- Do you have a problem hearing over the telephone?
- Do you have trouble following a conversation when 2 or more people are talking at the same time?
- Do people complain that you turn the TV volume up too high?
- Do you have to strain to understand conversations?
- Do you have trouble hearing in a noisy background?
- Do you find yourself asking people to repeat themselves?
- Do many people you talk to seem to mumble (or not speak clearly)?
- Do you misunderstand what others are saying and respond inappropriately?
- Do you have problems understanding the speech of women and children?

- Do people get annoyed because you misunderstand what they say?

MAKING A WALK A WORKOUT

An older person who exercises regularly will have more strength, mobility, balance and coordination and will be better able to manage daily living chores that allow people to remain independent. No matter how old you are or what shape you're in, there's an exercise that's right for you. Walking is a good all-around exercise that can help you improve the strength and condition of your heart and lungs. Here are some tips to make your walk a workout:

- **Wear comfortable shoes with good arch supports.** Your shoes should be made of materials that breathe, like leather or nylon.
- **Take long strides at a steady pace.** Hold your head erect, back straight and stomach flat. Point your toes straight ahead and let your arms swing loosely at your sides.
- **Start a regular routine by walking every other day for about 15 minutes.** Warm up by walking slowly for about five minutes, then faster for five minutes. Cool down by walking slowly for the last five.

- **Listen to your body.** Brisk walking should make your heart beat faster and your breathing deeper. Be sure to stop if you find yourself panting, feeling nauseous or unable to get your breathing back to normal within about 10 minutes.
- **Gradually increase your distance and the length of your stride.** In five weeks, you should be walking about a mile and be ready to increase the frequency of walking to five times a week. Keep five minutes of slow walking at the beginning and end, but extend your brisk-walking period.
- **Add time-and-distance goals to your walking sessions.** After seven weeks, try walking a mile in 20 minutes. Next, increase your distance and stick to the 20-minute goal. A good goal to work up to (over a period of about 15 weeks) is walking three miles in 45 minutes.
- **Remember good walking form.** Land on the heel of your foot and move forward to spring off the ball. You'll tire or become sore more quickly if you walk only on the ball of

your food or flatfooted.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY PAYMENTS

*By Debra Novotny, Social Security District Manager in Greensburg, PA
The American*

Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which the President signed into law in February, provides for a one-time payment of \$250 to people receiving Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits.

The one-time recovery payments will go out in May 2009, and all payments should be received by the end of May. In April, Social Security sent a letter with additional information to each person who is eligible for the one-time payment. The payments will be sent automatically, meaning no action is required on the part of the person receiving benefits. The economic recovery payments will be made separately from a person's regular monthly payments.

All adults who receive Social Security benefits, including disabled adult children (but not minor children), are eligible for the \$250 payment. In addition, all persons who receive SSI payments, including minor children, are eligible for the payment. Anyone who receives benefits or who was eligible to receive benefits during any of the three

months prior to enactment (November and December of 2008 and January 2009) will receive the one-time payment as long as the address of record is in one of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, U.S. Virgin Islands, America Samoa, or the Northern Mariana Islands.

The payments will be made in the same way that regular monthly payments are made. People with direct deposit will receive their payments electronically. Those who receive paper checks will receive their payments in the mail. People who receive regular payments through the *Direct Express* debit card will receive their one-time payments through the card.

If someone receives both Social Security and SSI, only one payment of \$250 will be made. The economic recovery legislation also provides for a one-time payment to recipients of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) benefits.

However, if you receive Social Security or SSI benefits and you also receive VA and/or RRB benefits, you will only receive one \$250 payment. The Social Security Administration will send you this payment.

To assist in processing the payments as efficiently as possible, please do not contact Social Security unless you do not receive a payment by June 4, 2009.

Information is available at www.socialsecurity.gov and will be updated regularly.

To learn more about the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009*, visit www.recovery.gov.

FARMERS MARKET VOUCHERS AVAILABLE

The 2009 Farmers Market Nutrition Program provides eligible seniors with vouchers to purchase produce grown or growable in Pennsylvania. This program, sponsored by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, provides up to \$20 in vouchers per person, and the vouchers can be used at participating Farmers Markets from June 1, 2009 until November 30, 2009. A list of participating Farmers Markets will be available at the distribution sites.

Applicants must bring proof of age and residency. Examples of these proofs are:

- Driver's license
- Photo identification card
- AAA transportation card
- Birth certificate
- Social Security documents
- Utility receipts

Homebound individuals may have someone apply for them with the required documentation of age and residency, as well as a completed proxy form. The proxy form will be available at the sign-up sites and the Area Agency on

Aging office. The form requires both the signature of the senior and the individual picking up the vouchers; therefore, the proxy form needs completed **prior to receiving the vouchers**. Residents of personal care and domiciliary care homes are not eligible.

The schedule for the county's senior centers is listed below. **All times are 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.**

New Kensington Senior Center

1039 Third Ave.
New Kensington
724-335-8597
Monday, June 22

McKenna Senior Center

971 Old Salem Rd.
Greensburg
724-837-8832
Thursday, June 4

West Newton Senior Center

103 Main St.
West Newton
724-872-4976
Monday, June 8

Latrobe Senior Center

Avenue C
Latrobe
724-539-0237
Wednesday, June 24

Herminie Senior Center

101 Sewickley Ave.
Herminie
724-446-3282
Wednesday, June 17

Mount Pleasant Senior Center

424 Washington St.
Mount Pleasant
724-547-4593
Monday, June 1

New Florence Senior Center

Ligonier St.
New Florence
724-235-2800
Friday, June 5

Laughlintown Senior Center

Center Ave.
Laughlintown
724-238-7942
Tuesday, June 9

Jeannette Senior Center

211 Gaskill St.
Jeannette
724-527-3200
Monday, June 8

Avonmore Senior Center

Railroad St.
Avonmore
724-697-4014
Wednesday, June 3

New Alexandria Senior Center

Main St.
New Alexandria
724-668-7055
Wednesday, June 10

Monessen Senior Center

1925 Grand Blvd.
Monessen
724-684-6105
Monday, June 1

East Vandergrift Senior Center

400 McKinley Ave.
East Vandergrift
724-568-2692
Thursday, June 11

Other sites will be scheduled later. You must be age 60 or older (as of December 31, 2009) and a Westmoreland County resident. Income guidelines were not available at the time of publication, but the AAA office and senior centers should have this information May 1, 2009. Please contact the Westmoreland County Area Agency on Aging at 724-830-4444 or toll-free 1-800-442-8000 or your local senior center with any questions.

SEARCHING FOR A JOB?

If you are 55 years of age or older, a resident of Westmoreland County, unemployed, and your income falls within our guidelines, you may be eligible for our training program.

The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) at Westmoreland County Community College enrolls low-income older adults to update old skills or get training in new skills, allowing you to earn while you learn in preparation for re-entering the job market. All positions earn \$7.15 per hour, 20 hours per week, and are available throughout Westmoreland County.

Available training positions are Elderly Care Worker, Clerical Assistant, Library Aide, Teacher's Aide and Dietary Aide.

For more information, please call Mimi Owens or Rebecca Dunn (724) 925-4066 or toll-free at 1-800-262-2103 and ask for the Senior Employment Program.

"DECODING THE MEDICATION MAZE" COMING TO IRWIN IN MAY

The Westmoreland County Area Agency on Aging is sponsoring a free Medication Management Seminar for older adults on Wednesday, May 27, 2009 at Banquets Unlimited in Irwin. Come help us celebrate Older Americans Month!

Various community professionals will address a variety of topics related to medication management including Dr. Charles Ward, Assistant Professor of the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy, Connie Frazier, Registered Dietician and Certified Diabetes Educator with the Joslin Diabetes Center of Western Pennsylvania Hospital and Dr. Richard Morgan, Author and retired Minister.

Banquets Unlimited is located just off Route 30 at 544 Caruthers Lane in Irwin. Registration begins at 8:00 a.m. with the program promptly starting at 9:00 a.m. The program will conclude at 2:15 p.m.

Older adults are invited to register and attend at no charge. A complimentary continental breakfast and luncheon are included. Banquets Unlimited is handicapped accessible.

You may register no more than two older adults by sending the registration form in this newsletter to the Area Agency on Aging. You must pre-register for this seminar, as space is limited. Registration is on a first come, first served basis. You may copy this form. You will receive a letter confirming your reservation. We hope to see you there!

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