

WESTMORELAND COUNTY

AREA AGENCY ON AGING

INSIDE LINE

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2009

THE SENIOR FUND

Honor the memory of a loved one or celebrate a special occasion with a gift to the Seniors' Fund. You will support our mission by enriching lives of the most needy, and the honoree will be notified that a tribute gift has been received. All tribute gifts are tax-deductible and can be made payable to "Community Foundation of Westmoreland County – Seniors' Fund". Please send to the attention of Denise Kummick, Westmoreland County Area Agency on Aging, 200 South Main Street, Greensburg, PA 15601.

HOLIDAY FOOD

Food is a large part of our holiday traditions, but improper handling may lead to serious health problems. Don't let your holiday season be spoiled by an upset stomach, diarrhea or more serious complications caused by foodborne illness. If you are hosting family or friends, take all the precautions to protect yourself and your guests from illness. From

the store to your table, there are many points at which harmful bacteria may contaminate your food.

While you are shopping, pay close attention to "sell by" and "expiration dates" on food. Choose your meats, poultry, and seafood at the end of your shopping trip so their time out of the refrigerator is limited. Refrigerate or freeze food as soon as you get home. Place meats and poultry on the lowest shelf in the fridge or on a tray or container so that juices won't drip on produce. The temperature of the refrigerator should be less than 40° F, and the freezer should be below 0° F.

Prior to pulling out your cookbook, wash all kitchen surfaces with warm soapy water. Make sure that the dishcloth you use is clean. Dishcloths may be a source of harmful bacteria. Cutting boards or other kitchen surfaces may be sanitized with a solution of one teaspoon of bleach with one quart of water. Wash your hands before touching

meats, poultry or eggs. Also, remember to wash your hands after touching your hair, blowing your nose and using the restroom.

Now that you are ready to start preparing the meal, there are several important steps to remember. Wash all fruits and vegetables with cold water before eating. Fresh produce should never be cut on a cutting board that was first used to cut meat, poultry or seafood unless the board has been sanitized. Never thaw foods by leaving them out on the counter. Thaw foods in the refrigerator or in the microwave.

As tempting as it may be, resist the urge to eat the raw cookie dough. Most cookie dough contains eggs, and eggs are a potential source of salmonella.

Only serve foods after cooking to proper temperatures. A whole turkey should be cooked to 180° F. Turkey breast should be cooked to an internal temperature of 170° F. A fully cooked ham may

be eaten cold or cooked to an internal temperature of 140° F. In order to determine the correct temperature, meat thermometers can be acquired at your local grocery store. Don't serve perishable food that has sat out for more than 2 hours. This includes any food item that requires refrigeration. Bacteria can multiply rapidly between the temperatures of 40-140° F making it dangerous to eat.

Place leftovers in shallow containers and refrigerate immediately. Use leftover meat, poultry and casseroles within 3-4 days. Use leftover gravy within 1-2 days. Freeze leftovers if you will not be eating them within 1-2 days.

TASTY RECIPES FOR PEOPLE WITH DIABETES

by The National Institutes of Health

A newly revised booklet-called *Tasty Recipes for People with Diabetes and Their Families*-is now available.

Available in Spanish and English, *Tasty Recipes* includes healthy food ideas with a Latin American flair. Learn how to make Spanish omelet, Caribbean red snapper, avocado tacos and other healthy dishes.

Each recipe comes with a Nutrition Facts table that lists calories, fat content and other dietary information. The book also includes tips for eating well and managing your diabetes.

It's a terrific addition to any kitchen.

To order a free copy of *Tasty Recipes*, call NIH's National Diabetes Education Program toll-free at 1-888-693-6337, or visit <http://ndep.nih.gov/publications/PublicationDetail.aspx?PubId=131>. A limited number of additional booklets can be purchased for \$1 each. You can also download a PDF version to print yourself at no cost.

THE POINSETTA

The Aztecs referred to the poinsettia as a "star flower" and used it to produce red dye and as an antipyretic medication. In both Chile and Peru, the plant became known as "Crown of the Andes".

The plants' association with Christmas began in 16th century Mexico, where legend tells of a young girl who was too poor to provide a gift for the celebration of Jesus' birthday. The tale goes that the child was inspired by an angel to gather weeds from the roadside and place them in front of the church altar. Crimson "blossoms" sprouted from the weeds and became beautiful poinsettias. From the 17th century, Franciscan monks in Mexico included the plants in their Christmas celebrations.

In the United States, December 12th is National Poinsettia Day.

HEALTHY GIFT IDEAS

We all know how hard it is to stay healthy over the holidays. This year, don't be part of the problem. Here are some gift ideas to help your family and friends stay healthy.

Typical food gifts encourage unhealthy eating during the holidays. Instead of giving a box of rich chocolate, try something more nutritious, like a box of fresh fruit. You can also give gift boxes of almonds, walnuts and other unsalted nuts. Another idea might be a collection of gourmet teas.

You can find such healthy food gifts in stores or search for them online and have them sent directly. Many come in reusable metal boxes that can serve as a reminder of your thoughtfulness for years to come.

Another option is to prepare something yourself. You might put together a soup mix in a nice mason jar. Or you can simply get a gift card to a health food store or a quality grocery store to encourage them to pick out what they like themselves.

Other gifts beside food can promote nutritious eating. Reusable bento boxes, which have several small compartments for food, can encourage people to take healthier, homemade lunches to work. Traditionally, these boxes have been used in Japan to pack small portions of rice, vegetables and fish or meat.

We all know the size and shape of containers can dictate the amount of food we consume. You can also include a healthy foods cookbook.

Physical activity, of course, is the other part of staying healthy. For kids, sports equipment can be a great gift. Even something small like a flying disc, boomerang, football or soccer ball can provide hours of healthy and fun family activity.

Exercise clothing, particularly outdoor clothes for cold weather exercise, can make a great holiday gift. So can accessories, like a pedometer, which is an inexpensive device you clip to your belt to measure how many steps you take per day. A good goal is to get at least 10,000 steps per day.

A watch with a heart rate monitor can be a wonderful gift for active people. It can help them exercise at a level that safely improves their fitness. For runners, a watch with a GPS (global positioning system) can help them track not only how far they're running but also their average pace. Hikers might also appreciate a GPS device or other accessories, like a walking stick.

With a gift of a bicycle trainer, a cyclist can keep cycling no matter how bad the weather. The hub of a bicycle's back wheel clamps into one of these devices, allowing cyclists to spin indoors. Cyclists can switch

gears to vary resistance and at the same time read, watch TV or use a video to boost motivation. For the more serious cyclist, bicycle rollers provide a realistic, but pricier, indoor cycling experience.

Other pricier fit gift ideas include a bicycle, push scooter, ping-pong table or indoor exercise equipment like a treadmill. Some video game systems have special accessories that encourage physical activity as well.

If you're not sure what they'd like, consider giving a gift card for an outdoor or sports shop. For someone who doesn't know where to start, a drop-in gift certificate for exercise or yoga classes at a local health club might encourage them to get into the exercise habit.

Books and videos on health and fitness are also a good gift idea. These can outline a fitness program or help improve performance in a sport. Or try a book of local walking tours, hiking paths or bicycling paths.

Another idea is to give a subscription to a healthy living magazine. Whether cooking, fitness or general health, a monthly dose of good advice can help people stay on track all year round.

Chronic stress has been linked to high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, stroke and other cardiovascular problems. So why not give something to help with relaxation? It could be soothing music,

candles or soaps. Also consider a gift certificate for a massage or relaxation spa.

Scientists are finding that the arts can benefit both your mental and physical health. So how about art supplies or a musical instrument as a gift? A gift certificate for dance lessons can improve both mental and physical health.

You don't even have to spend any money to give a great gift, either. You can make up a coupon for a run, bike ride or a workout together or even just to meet for a walk. Get creative and give a gift you know they'll love, and that will love them back.

A NOTE ABOUT MAILINGS

We are updating our Inside Line mailing list. Please let us know if you are moving, receive more than one newsletter at the same address, or wish to be removed from the mailing list. Undeliverable and unwanted mailings expend our valuable resources. To update our records, call 724-830-4444 or 1-800-442-8000. Thank you.

JOB TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Direct Care

Workers: If you are interested in the Home Health Care field, the Senior Community Service Employment

Program (SCSEP) may be able to provide training.

The 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 \$7.25 per hour, 20 hours per week, and are available throughout Westmoreland County.

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.

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.

Available Training Positions

Clerical Assistant – Update office skills; computer training opportunity.

Library Aide – Individuals should possess an inquisitive, helpful attitude.

Teacher's Aide – Assist in pre-school children's center.

OUTSMART DIABETES

Scientists discovered the SHIP2 gene, which can nearly double your odds of developing type 2 diabetes. This disease occurs when your body has trouble producing or using insulin, the hormone that moves

glucose (blood sugar) into cells for energy. But SHIP2 carriers make up only about 20 percent of those with diabetes. The other 80 percent of cases are mostly due to your habits and environment. Protect yourself now with these steps:

- **Fill up on fiber.** Steer clear of fried and processed foods and reach for high-fiber, complex carbohydrates such as fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole-grain products. Fibrous foods digest slowly, so blood sugar levels remain steady.
- **Learn to relax, especially on the job.** Persistent high levels of the stress hormone cortisol can reduce the release of insulin, leading to diabetes. Studies also show that stress leads to overeating and extra pounds, another diabetes risk factor. Exercise and relaxation techniques are two ways to ease tension. Practice muscle relaxation anywhere by simply tensing and then relaxing all the muscles in your body.
- **Whittle your waist.** A mere 5 to 10 percent reduction in weight, coupled with 30 minutes of daily heart-pumping exercise, is enough to

reduce diabetes risk by nearly 60 percent, according to American Diabetes Association studies.

- **Kick those butts.** Smokers are nearly three times as likely to develop diabetes as non-smokers. Substances in cigarettes, such as nicotine and cadmium, can spike levels of stress hormones, slowing insulin production.
- **Fuel your body.** Eating every three to four hours may reduce your odds of developing insulin resistance. Skipping meals makes your body work harder to keep blood sugar under control, eventually desensitizing cells' response to insulin. So eat three fiber-filled meals plus three healthy snacks a day. You should be tested for diabetes if you are overweight, have a parent or sibling with the disease, have had gestational (pregnancy-related) diabetes, a member of a high-risk group (African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asian-Americans) and/or you rarely exercise. Talk with your internist about checking your glucose levels.

CARE TRANSITIONS COACH PROGRAM

Excelsa Health and Westmoreland County Area Agency on Aging (AAA) are offering a free program to members of the community being discharged from the hospital. The "Care Transitions Coach Program" is designed to help patients manage their transition from the hospital to home. It will provide you with the necessary tools to better manage your healthcare; increase your overall satisfaction with your hospital discharge process and reduce hospital readmissions and emergency department visits.

A member of the AAA staff who has been specially trained as a Health Coach will provide, free of charge, a structured hospital visit, one home visit and structured follow-up phone calls. Involvement in the program usually ends within 30 days of hospital discharge. During the time with your Coach, the following four areas will be reviewed:

- A Personal Health Record (PHR) to improve communication and ensure continuity of your care across all your health care providers.
- The Red Flags, or indications, that your condition is worsening and how to respond.
- A Medication Self-Management process

to be sure you are knowledgeable about the medications you take.

- How to be an active participant in your care during your follow up visits with your physician.

We will keep your information confidential, in the same manner as your medical records are currently managed. Any information that identifies you may be shared among members of the Care Transitions Coaching Team. The combined results of this program may be presented at meetings or in published articles. Please be assured that your name will be kept confidential, and we will never disclose your patient-specific information without your written consent. For more information about this and all the AAA programs, please call 724-830-4444 or 1-800-442-8000.

FYI

- **The seasonal flu vaccine** is recommended for anyone who wants to reduce their risk of becoming ill with flu and is particularly important for persons at increased risk of severe illness. Please contact your local senior center for the 2009 flu shot clinics or your healthcare provider.

- **H1N1 flu** seems to infect people age 65 or older less frequently than younger people. However, the small minority of people over 65 who do become infected with H1N1 are at higher risk of complications. Please contact your healthcare provider to discuss your specific needs.
- **RSVP and AARP** is gearing up for the 2010 tax season but is in need of volunteers. Volunteers attend a training session conducted by the IRS and include testing to ensure accurate service. For more information or to sign up for the class, please call RSVP at 724-925-4213.
- **Ursuline Senior Services** offers Free Seasonal Flu Shots for homebound seniors 60 years and older. They classify homebound as anyone who would require support to leave home. The program started October 1, 2009 and will run through December 1, 2009. Please call Ursuline Senior Services at 412-683-0400 ext. 264 and leave a message.
- **Extra Help** program may help provide the

payment of monthly premiums, annual deductibles and co-payments related to the Medicare Prescription Drug Program. If you are single with income below \$1,354/month and assets less than \$12,510 or married with income below \$1,821/month and assets less than \$25,010, then call APPRISE at 1-800-262-2103 x4213. If you are on Medicaid and Medicare or have Medicare and SSI, you receive Extra Help automatically and DO NOT have to apply.

- **Café R Way** will open to the public Friday, November 6, 2009 from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm at the New Kensington Senior Center located at 1039 Third Avenue, New Kensington, PA. The café will operate Fridays only and offer affordable, healthy lunches and a friendly atmosphere.
- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program**, formerly called food stamps qualifies single seniors with a monthly income of up to \$1,734 and couples up to \$2,334. It does not matter how much you have in assets, resources or savings.

If you are eligible, you can receive a monthly grant of anywhere from \$16 to \$200 to help you buy food. The exact amount depends on your household's income, size and certain expenses. For more information about SNAP, call 1-800-634-2033.

- **PA SeniorLAW Helpline** for free legal information, advice and referrals. Call 1-877-727-7529, Monday through Friday from 10 am to 4 pm.
- **November 15 - December 31, 2009** is the annual enrollment period for Medicare. You may want to review your current health plan for 2010 so you are prepared, if necessary, to make changes. Ask yourself: Is my healthcare plan affordable? Does it meet my needs? Does it cover my medications? Is the healthcare company easy to work with when there is an issue? If the answer is "no" to any of these questions, call APPRISE at 1-800-262-2103 ext. 4213 for FREE information and counseling.
- **Garden of Eat'n Café** is now open to

the public on Mondays and Wednesdays from 11:00 am to 1:30 pm at the McKenna Senior Center located at 971 Old Salem Road, Greensburg, PA. Join in on the relaxing atmosphere for affordable, healthy lunches. For more information, call 724-837-4330.

- **2009-2010 LIHEAP Program** season opens November 2, 2009. Recipients of 2008 benefits will automatically be mailed an application. New applicants may call 724-832-5524 or 724-832-5218 for more information or apply online at www.compass.state.pa.us.

RETIRED WITH CHILDREN

*by Debra E. Novotny, District Manager
Social Security, Greensburg, PA*

The idea of someone being "retired with children" may seem like the seed of another television sit-com or reality show. But the fact is that it's becoming more and more common for older people to have minor children in their care, whether by bringing new children into the world, taking over the care of grandchildren or adopting children who need nurturing parents.

So it's important to know that if you receive Social Security benefits and have minor children who depend on you, you might be able to receive benefits for them, too. This is true whether you receive benefits as a retiree or you receive Social Security disability or survivors' benefits. To get benefits, a child must have a parent (or in some cases a grandparent) who:

- Is disabled or retired and entitled to Social Security benefits; or
- Died after having worked long enough in a job where he or she paid Social Security taxes.

The child must be:

- Unmarried; and
- Younger than age 18; or
- 18-19 years old and a full-time student (no higher than grade 12); or
- 18 or older and disabled. (The disability must have started before age 22.)

Within a family, a child may receive up to one-half of the parent's full retirement or disability benefit, or 75 percent of the deceased parent's basic Social Security benefit. However, there is a limit to the amount of money that can be paid to a family. The maximum family payment can be from 150 to 180 percent of the parent's full benefit amount. If the total amount payable to all family

members exceeds this limit, each child's benefit is reduced proportionately until the total equals the maximum allowable amount.

For example, if you are retired with a minor child and your benefit payment is \$1,000 a month, your minor child could get up to half of that each month, or \$500. However, if you had two minor children in your care, the maximum your entire family could receive would be between \$1,500 and \$1,800; that's \$1,000 for you and between \$250 and \$400 per child.

If you have minor children and receive Social Security, you will want to read Social Security's online publication, *Benefits for Children* at www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs/10085.html.

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