

WESTMORELAND COUNTY

AREA AGENCY ON AGING

INSIDE LINE

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2008

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.

JOB TRAINING

If you are 55 years of age or older, a resident of Westmoreland County, and your income falls within the guidelines, you may be eligible for the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) at Westmoreland County Community College. For more information, please call Mimi Owens or Rebecca

Dunn at 724-925-4066 or toll-free at 1-800-262-2103

10 FUN WAYS TO REDUCE YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE

Parties, presents, pies – you just got to love the holidays. But all that hoopla ranks super high on your stress-o-meter. You're rushing to get everything done, eating and drinking more, and sleeping and exercising less. All these factors can cause your blood pressure to rise, even if you've always had a healthy reading. While there is no direct link between these temporary spikes and an increased risk of heart attack, experts say fending off hypertension now and year round is crucial. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Eat some dark chocolate.** Cocoa is loaded with flavonols – antioxidants that help ease inflammation and improve blood flow. Try strawberries dipped in dark chocolate or the flavonol-rich, 100

calorie CocoaVia candy bar.

- **Knit this year's gifts.** Repetitive tasks, such as knitting, require concentration, which means your thoughts are focused on the task and not on your worries.
- **Warm up with a latte – made with soy.** Soy proteins may widen blood vessels, improving blood flow, therefore, lowering blood pressure. Other soy-rich options: tofu and edamame.
- **Try meditating.** Meditating decreases your response to adrenaline for a few hours, which keeps you calmer and your blood pressure down. Tune everything out, slowly inhale to the count of four, and then exhale counting backwards from four to one. Repeat for one to two minutes.

- **Give your sweetie or kids a squeeze.** Hugging can release oxytocin, a hormone that relaxes blood vessels and reduces levels of stress hormones, thus lowering blood pressure. The same effect can be achieved from petting your dog or cat.
- **Eat when you drink.** Drinking on an empty stomach can increase your risk of hypertension by 64 percent. Alcohol quickly enters the bloodstream and spikes blood pressure.
- **Add flaxseed to your cookies.** Eating a fiber-rich diet can improve blood pressure levels by helping with weight loss and reducing insulin resistance, a hypertension risk factor. Flaxseed is high in fiber and omega-3 fatty acids, which helps lower cholesterol and blood pressure slightly.
- **Get moving.** Exercise helps fend off seasonal weight gain and keeps stress levels in check.
- **Watch a funny movie.** Laughing helps your blood vessels expand and increases blood flow.
- **Go green and red for lunch.** Spinach, rich in folic acid helps

your body maintain normal levels of homocysteine – an amino acid, which in excess can damage blood vessels and increase pressure. Tomatoes, full of lycopene, an antioxidant which helps improve blood flow. If you don't care for salads, try orange juice and fortified cereals for folic acid, and pink grapefruit for lycopene.

HEFT FOR THE HOLIDAYS

by The National Institutes of Health

Indulge in rich foods over the holiday season, and you may wind up paying the price in extra pounds. While research shows that most people don't gain as much weight as they fear they will over the holidays, many can't seem to lose their holiday pounds afterward. The extra weight can build up over the years and contribute to obesity later in life. Why not make this the year you reverse the trend and stop gaining weight over the holidays?

Maintaining weight is a matter of balance – energy balance. If you take in more calories than you burn in physical activity, you store the extra energy around your body, mostly as fat, and gain weight. To maintain your weight, you need to balance

the energy you take in with the energy you burn.

Dr. Jack Yanovski, head of the Unit on Growth and Obesity at NIH, explains that our bodies' energy controls are very accurate. "Over the course of the year, the average adult consumes about 912,500 calories." Someone who eats just an extra 4,050 calories a year will gain a pound over the course of that year. To put this in perspective, break a rice cake into 4 pieces or a pretzel rod into 10. One piece is 11 calories. "You can see that very small imbalances that would be easy to miss could account for the average weight gain that we see", Yanovski says.

If you keep your weight in check for most of the year but have trouble during the holidays, Yanovski offers this:

- **Be active.** If you exercise regularly, keep it up over the holidays. If you're not active now, get started and make a serious New Year's resolution to stick with it.
- **Schedule holiday food celebrations at normal meal times.** Eating outside of normal meal times encourages people to pile on excess calories.
- **Limit soda and other sweetened beverages.** A 12-ounce soda can have more than 150

calories. A 16-ounce glass of punch or lemonade can have over 200 calories. Don't overdo natural fruit juices either since they also carry many calories. It's best to go with calorie-free bottled water, plain or sparkling, when it's available. Diet beverages made with artificial sweeteners can help you control your calories at celebrations, although drinking them on a regular basis may not help with long-term control.

- **Limit alcohol consumption.** A single shot of liquor, about 2 ounces, is nearly 125 calories. A 5-ounce glass of wine or a 12-ounce glass of beer is about 160. Sweet mixed drinks have even more calories. An 8-ounce margarita, for example, has 240 calories.
- **Choose foods lower in energy density or fewer calories.** For example, start out your meal with a salad or soup. Skip the second helpings of stuffing, mashed potatoes and gravy; go for more vegetables instead. If you're bringing dessert, serve angel food cake, ginger bread or fruit instead

of brownies, pound cake or chocolate cake. Try to avoid high-fat foods and you'll likely cut down on the calories. So use low-fat or skim milk instead of whole milk or half-and-half. Skip the butter. Eat your turkey without the skin. And cut away the visible fat from meats.

- **Eat a healthy snack before a holiday celebration.** You'll be less likely to eat a lot of fattening food at the party.
- **Use smaller plates.** The bigger your plate and the more food that's on it, the more you're likely to eat at a given meal.
- **Weigh yourself daily.** Plan how you'll get back on track if your weight begins to creep up. It's better to keep it off now than to try to lose it later.

RAISE A TOAST TO HEALTHY HOLIDAYS

by The National Institutes of Health

If you're celebrating the holidays with family and friends, there's a good chance alcohol will be part of the picture. When it comes to holiday drinking, the consequences can range from making an embarrassing remark to being arrested for drunken

driving or causing a deadly traffic accident. "The main problem with holiday drinking is that people are often drinking for longer periods of time than they normally do, and they're staying up later than they normally do. They may not have a good frame of reference for how the alcohol will affect them," says Dr. Dennis Twombly, a scientist at NIH's National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

Low levels of alcohol can act as a stimulant. "At low doses, alcohol has effects that the brain perceives as positive and rewarding," Twombly explains. "It can cause euphoria and relieve anxiety and stress." At higher levels, alcohol's impact on the brain begins to take a downturn. It can act as a depressant and make you sleepy. Twombly says, "You start to see effects on other areas of the brain like the cerebellum, which causes people to lose their balance and coordination. Their reaction times may become slower. Their ability to speak may become somewhat impaired." Inhibition and judgment are also affected, and emotions can become unstable.

Alcohol quickly moves from your stomach into your bloodstream, where it travels to all your major organs and tissues. Eating before you drink helps slow down this process. When alcohol reaches your liver, it gets

broken down and converted to other substances. Liver enzymes, however, can only break down about half of an alcohol-containing beverage per hour. If you drink alcohol faster than your liver can clear it, the alcohol levels in your blood will climb. This excess alcohol continues to circulate throughout the body long after your last drink, affecting your heart, brain and other organs, Therefore, limit yourself to half of an alcohol-containing drink per hour and alternate alcohol drinks with non-alcohol ones such as water, soda or juice.

For holiday revelers, or anyone who drinks to excess in a single evening, the next day is likely to bring great discomfort in the form of a hangover. Painkillers like aspirin may help with headaches, but don't take acetaminophen, a common alternative. The drug can interact with alcohol and damage the liver.

Drinking coffee won't help either. Twombly explains, "It might help with drowsiness, but it will have no effect whatsoever on how intoxicated you are or how rapidly the alcohol is absorbed or eliminated from the body."

The only real cure for a hangover is time, Twombly says. "Sleeping it off, eating a little and drinking non-alcoholic beverages can help. But you basically have to wait for the alcohol and its

by-products to be cleared from your system."

If you get a hangover over the holidays, let it inspire a New Year's resolution – to drink responsibly and moderately in the coming years. Finally make sure you have a designated driver to get everyone home safely after the celebration.

PD WAIVER PROGRAM

The Westmoreland County Area Agency on Aging (AAA) has offered the Pennsylvania Department of Aging (PDA) Waiver Program to Westmoreland County residents since 1997. The PDA Waiver Program provides home and community-based services to individuals, age 60 and older, who are Medical Assistance eligible and require nursing level care.

Home and community-based services are offered as an alternative to institutional or extended in-patient hospital care. Services offered include personal care services, respite care, home support, home health and attendant care in addition to other services. Under the PDA Waiver Program, the individual selects his service provider from a list of providers certified by the AAA.

The application process begins by contacting the AAA and requesting PDA Waiver services. The referral source may be the applicant,

a medical provider, a representative of a hospital or any other responsible party acting on behalf of the applicant.

The income limit for the Waiver Program is \$1,911.00 per month for one person. The resource limit is \$2,000.00 plus a \$6,000.00 exclusion. Only the applicant's income and resources are considered, not the spouse's.

For more information or to refer someone for services, please contact the Westmoreland County Area Agency on Aging at 724-830-4444 or toll-free 1-800-442-8000. In Monessen, call 724-684-3141 or toll-free 1-800-339-9454.

WE NEED YOUR HELP

We are updating our Inside Line mailing list. Please let us know if you are moving, receive more than one newsletter, 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.

FYI

- **Bus trip to Harrisburg's Pennsylvania Christmas and Gift Show.** December 4, 2008 departure 6:45 a.m. and return 9:30 p.m. Cost is \$40.00. Call The Aerobic

Center at 724-834-2153 for more information.

- **Seton Hill University Theatre** presents "The Bald Soprano" and "The Lesson" by Eugene Ionesco from November 14th through the 22nd. You can also buy a "Dinner and a Show" ticket which includes either a buffet lunch or dinner at the Red Star and shuttle service to and from Reeves Theatre. Order tickets by phone at 724-838-4241.
- **Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles available for sell or rent** in the Monroeville/Wall area. Go to www.mobilityworks.com or call 1-866-711-5071 or 412-824-8091 to learn more.
- **Law & Legislation Website for Grandparents** at www.grandfamilies.org for laws, policies or legislation relating to grandparents and other relatives raising children.
- **Open Enrollment for Medicare D Prescription Coverage** begins November 15, 2008 and will continue through December 31, 2008 for an opportunity to enroll or change plans. For

questions or concerns about your coverage, contact the APPRISE Program at 1-800-262-2103, ext. 4213.

- **Property Tax/Rent Rebate Deadline Extended** from June 30 to December 31, 2008. If you are age 65+, widowed and age 50+, disabled at 18+ and your income does not exceed \$15,000 for renters and \$35,000 for home owners, then you may be entitled to a rebate of \$650. For a form call 1-800-362-2050 or more information at 724-832-5386.
- **2008-2009 LIHEAP Program season opens November 3, 2008.** To apply, call 724-832-5524 or 724-832-5218 or visit your local county assistance office. You may also apply online at www.compass.state.pa.us.

CAREGIVING FOR PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA

November is National Caregiver and National Alzheimer's Awareness month. People with dementia (a gradual and progressive decline in memory, thinking and reasoning skills) slowly become less able to take care of themselves. The most common cause of

dementia is Alzheimer's disease, a disorder that results in the loss of brain cells. At first, a person may need only prompting or a little help, but eventually caregivers will become responsible for all personal care.

Loss of independence and privacy can be very difficult for the person with dementia. Caregivers must be aware of their loved one's reactions, abilities and fears to provide the necessary daily care. The Alzheimer's Association recommends ways to assist a person with dementia with changing personal-care needs:

- **Bathing** is often the most difficult activity the caregivers face. People with dementia may perceive it as unpleasant or threatening. In turn, they may act in disruptive ways like screaming, resisting or hitting. To assist:
 1. Prepare the bathroom by having everything at hand and room temperature just right.
 2. Make the bathroom safe by installing grab bars, using non-slip mats, a tub bench and only two or three inches of water in the tub.

3. Help the person feel in control by involving and coaching the person through each step of bathing.
 4. Respect the person's dignity by holding a towel in front of his or her body in and out of the tub.
 5. Perhaps a "sponge bath" is enough.
- **Dental Care** can help to prevent eating difficulties, digestive problems and extensive dental procedures down the road. To assist:
 1. Provide short simple instructions by breaking down each step.
 2. Use a "watch me" approach or put your hand over the person's hand, gently guiding the brush.
 3. Monitor daily oral care of teeth or dentures by brushing after each meal and flossing daily. Gently brush the person's gums, tongue and roof of the mouth. Watch at meal times if person shows any signs of mouth discomfort.
 - 4. Keep up with regular dental visits for as long as possible.
 - **Dressing** and appearance contributes to a person's sense of self-esteem but choosing and putting on clothes can be frustrating. To assist:
 1. Simplify choices to prevent panic.
 2. Organize the process by laying out in the order that each item should be put on. Hand the person one item at a time and give simple instructions. Don't rush the person. Haste can cause anxiety.
 3. Choose comfortable and simple clothing. Substitute Velcro® for buttons, snaps or zippers. Make sure the person has comfortable non-slip shoes.
 4. Be flexible if the individual wants to wear the same outfit, buy duplicate outfits. Offer praise, not criticism, if clothing is mismatched.
 - **Eating** may become overwhelming with too many food choices or forgetting to eat or think that they have already eaten. To assist:
 1. Make mealtimes calm and comfortable, away from television and other distractions.
 2. Offer one food item at a time on the person's plate.
 3. Encourage independence. Allow the person to eat from a bowl instead of a plate, with a spoon instead of a fork or even with his or her hands, if it's easier.
 4. Be flexible to food preferences because the person may suddenly develop certain food preferences or reject foods he or she liked in the past.

5. Be alert for signs of choking and avoid foods that are difficult to chew thoroughly.
- **Grooming** like combing hair, caring for fingernails or shaving may be forgotten by the person with dementia. To assist:
 1. Maintain the person's grooming routines. Allow them to continue using their favorite toothpaste, shaving cream, cologne or makeup.
 2. Perform tasks alongside and encourage the person to copy your motions.
 3. Use safer, simpler grooming tools such as cardboard nail files and electric shavers instead of clippers and razors.
 - **Toileting** due to a person's loss of bladder or bowel control or the inability to recognize natural urges, forgetting where the bathroom is or side effects from medicine. To assist:

1. Make sure clothing is easy to remove.
2. Post a sign or picture of a toilet on the bathroom door. Use colored rugs on the bathroom floor and colored toilet lids to help the toilet stand out.
3. Offer reminders to encourage the person to go regularly. Watch for signs of agitation or pacing that may indicate the need to use the bathroom.
4. Limit fluids in the evening or schedule bathroom visits in the middle of the night. Consider a bedside commode.
5. Provide incontinence products such as rubber sheets or incontinence pads on the person's bed. Padded undergarments or adult briefs are another option.
6. Be supportive and help the person retain a

dignity.
Reassure the person to reduce feelings of embarrassment

For reliable information and support, contact the Alzheimer's Association helpline at 1-800-272-3900 or website at www.alzpa.org.

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