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recalling events. The study also found that a healthy dose of exercise made participants less likely to develop Alzheimer's, even if they were predisposed genetically to the disease.

"The issue isn't convincing older adults that exercising is important," says Sarah Kennedy, MA, fitness coordinator at Splendid, a continuing care retirement community in Tucson, Ariz. "The challenge is fostering an adoption and maintenance of a physically active lifestyle, which is a challenge for any person at any age."

STRONG LIVING

A new program called Strong Living takes a progressive approach to strength training and challenges older adults to build muscle strength by heightening their weight-lifting capacities, as opposed to reducing the amount of weight they use, which is indicative of more traditional programs.

Strong Living runs for 12 weeks and focuses on the adult's strength and balance. Developed by Jennifer Layne, an exercise physiologist at the USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University, the program incorporates the latest research on exercise and aging, which shows lifting weights that are challenging is essential if older adults want to improve their muscle strength, bone density and overall fitness.

Since its start, the program has become a national model for successful group exercise programs for active older adults and is being taught in more than 90 sites throughout the United States.

SENIOR CONSIDERATIONS

Any program's strength comes from its foundation and focus on the modifiable factors that determine physical activity in older adults: self-efficacy for physical activity, perceived benefits of physical activity, support for a ▶



KYLE KIELINSKI

Stepping Past Stereotypes

Older people have a lot to gain from staying physically active and a lot to lose if they sit around.

BY RANDI KLEBANOFF, MS, MPH, CHES

Adults used to hear that they needed to reduce the impact of physical exercise as they got older and just take it easy in their rocking chairs. But that stereotype has lost steam. According to "Exercise: A Guide from the National Institute on Aging," older people of different physical conditions have a lot to gain from staying physically active and a lot to lose if they sit around.

BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

An exercise plan not only has physical benefits, but mental ones too. A study released by Columbia University Medical Center found that regular exercise can coax the human brain into growing new nerve cells; a process that, for decades, had been thought to be impossible.¹

People who exercised in a high-intensity aerobics program for only three months saw dramatic effects, such as remembering and

physically active lifestyle and the elimination of barriers to physical activity.

A program's goal should not only be to modify lifestyle behaviors, but also to change long-held assumptions about physical activity. Hiring trainers and instructors who are educated, experienced and possess a passion for fitness isn't enough. These professionals need to be passionate about older adults getting fit.

"When working with older adults, staff members need to be especially sensitive to a fear of exercise. They also need to be patient and nonjudgmental about varying physical abilities," says Kennedy.

FUNCTIONAL FITNESS

A comprehensive physical activity program for older adults should touch on cardiovascular,

strength, balance and flexibility training. To help program participants achieve functional fitness, group exercise classes should incorporate movements that duplicate common activities of daily living, such as twisting, reaching and bending. Older adults who participate and succeed in these activities increase their fitness levels and enhance their self-efficacy for a physically active lifestyle.

Functional fitness scores points with the older adult audience. "A lifestyle modification program that includes physical activity can enhance an individual's capacity to perform normal everyday activities safely and independently and without feeling overwhelmed and tired," says Kennedy.

The American Council on Exercise (ACE), a certification, education and training organization, recently released results of its exclusive study that examined functional fitness programming for older adults, proving that it works and most will see real-world benefits relatively quickly.²

DEVELOPING A PROGRAM

An organization can run a winning program without securing space for a fitness center and purchasing cardiovascular and resistance-training machines.

"Inexpensive equipment, but the right equipment, and creative thinking really make up the nuts and bolts of an effective, fun and safe program," says Reed Engel, MA, FAWHP, director of wellness strategies at Mather LifeWays, Evanston, Ill. "Exercise classes are very popular, and partnerships with community- and religious-based organizations can lead to free use of space and facilities."

Pilates, which focuses on core postural muscles that help keep the body balanced, is a hot class at two Mather's—More Than a Café locations in the Chicagoland area.

A senior fitness program can foster a belief in the positive impact of exercise by providing older adults with information on the many benefits they could gain from physical activity. Organizations could present this information in the form of handouts, bulletin boards and health talks.

MEETING MANY NEEDS

"A number of Mather LifeWays' health seminars focus on breaking down barriers to getting fit. Topics include time management,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 48

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 46

financial support and accessibility," says Engel.

According to Kennedy, Splendido residents have responded to Strong Living because the program touches on all the right spots. In addition to ensuring that all participants are well informed, the program is readily accessible, free, safe and effective, individualized, educational and social.

The central goal of older adult exercise—and organizations creating programs to meet a desire to exercise—is about having goals. Long-term goals should be broken down into short-term goals and should be specific, measurable, personal and realistic.

"Tracking participants' progress is useful, and it's always effective to develop a plan of action together. Above all, you've got to keep your program fun," says Kennedy. ■

References

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Randi Klebanoff has worked in the fitness and wellness field for more than 15 years. She holds master's degrees in exercise science and public health and is a certified health education specialist and Intrinsic Coach.® As the wellness initiatives manager for Mather LifeWays, Klebanoff develops wellness programs for older adults in a community-based setting. E-mail her at rklebanoff@matherlifeways.com.

The Wider Picture of Wellness

When developing a wellness program for your residents, don't forget the needs of staff too.

BY SARA V. SINCLAIR, RN, CNHA, ACHCA FELLOW

Some innovative long-term care providers are emphasizing the concepts of health promotion and wellness for people of all ages. It makes sense for a focus on wellness to be part of your general philosophy of care for your residents, your mission, and it should be noticeable in all areas of your operation.

MAKING SMART CHANGES

Wellness is a positive approach to aging for health care providers and their patients; it is vital to coping effectively with the challenges aging presents. Individual health is strongly influenced by the physical, social, economic and family environments. Personal health habits play a powerful role in the prevention or development of many diseases and injuries. Health care providers should be very aware of this fact, and they should be careful to assess these influences on themselves and their patients.

Dietary improvement, careful medication management, smoking cessation, adequate exercise, stress management, reduced alcohol intake, control of hypertension, adequate sleep, immunizations, regular checkups, consistent use of seatbelts, wearing a helmet when riding open vehicles, a general focus on safety and early detection screening tests (mammograms, Pap smears, bone density tests, PSA, colonoscopies, eye exams) are a few well known ways to promote one's health. Other key components of health promotion and wellness are sexuality and affection, eye and ear care, skin care, dental attention, and safety and accident prevention.

The goal of wellness is not preventing disease, but achieving optimal holistic health within the limits of one's own being. It involves

tuning in to one's strengths and limitations early on, improving where possible, and avoiding that which is deleterious to health. Most health promotion and wellness programs primarily stress nutrition, fitness and stress management, and consist of a combination of health education and related organizational, political and economic changes which promote improved holistic health—physical, psychosocial, emotional and spiritual.

POSITIVE AGING

There is much people can do to minimize, compensate for, or even postpone the effects of the changes which accompany natural aging. Aging is a natural and unavoidable process, but it doesn't have to be negative. It is a positive thing to have the opportunity to age and it should be a growth and development period of one's life.

Through practicing positive lifestyle behaviors that promote well-being, rejecting negative myths, and by using available community resources, health care providers and residents can preserve their wellness levels to a much greater extent.

Wellness has been defined as feeling sufficiently good about oneself to take stock of one's own life and to intervene and nourish the self as necessary. The state of wellness involves care and concern for self, but also the act of reaching out and giving your time and energy to the greater community. The rewards are immeasurable. The bottom line is that wellness is a personal quest worthy of your efforts at any stage of your life cycle. ■

Sara V. Sinclair is a long-term care consultant. She can be reached at saravsinclair@yahoo.com.



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FIGURE 2 Slip lower half of suit on, one leg at a time.

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FIGURE 4 Pull right side of suit over to the left side of your body, and fasten the Velcro.

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