

Healthy Lifestyle = Activities + Nutrition

As we get older our body functions and personal lifestyles change and unless we are proactive the results of the aging process will not be positive. We certainly cannot prevent all diseases and accidents nor ignore our genetics, but we can do many things that will positively contribute to our overall health. All doctors agree that two of the primary elements to maintaining our health as we age are to be active (both physically and mentally) and to practice good nutrition habits. Be good to your body....you only have one and it has worked hard for you for many years!

Two months ago in this Senior Scope publication we focused on the new science of brain exercise called “neurobics” as it is a very critical half of staying active as we age. The other half of activity is physical exercise. Both parts are equally important. What most of us fail to do as we age is to conscientiously do things that exercise all major muscle groups so we can maintain balance, flexibility, stamina, proper weight, cardiac and lung functioning. We all have excuses and after we say them enough times we likely even begin to believe them.

- I do a lot of volunteer work or take care of my grandchildren so I get enough exercise
- My spouse doesn't exercise so it wouldn't be right for me to do something without him/her
- It is too expensive to join a health club or to sign up for exercise classes
- I'm afraid I'll injure myself so I stopped dancing/basketball/tennis/skiing, etc.

STOP. You are the only one responsible for your behavior and for your own body. If you are not doing enough physical activity now that can be defined as exercise then start with at least one hour a week. This can be divided into six ten minute sessions or three twenty minute sessions, etc. This hour of exercise should contribute to keeping your muscles and joints supple and flexible and can also reduce the effects of arthritis or stiff joints. Exercise should get your blood pumping faster. Of course, an hour of week is not optimal and you should add to this time as your body adjusts to your activity level. One of the ways to exercise that is becoming very popular with seniors is to use the Wii®, Wii Games®, Wii Fit® or Wii Fit Plus®.

What is the Wii Fit®? Developed by Nintendo, their website defines it as an exercise video game for the Wii console consisting of activities using the Wii Balance Board. Activities are divided into four categories: yoga, strength training, aerobics, and balance games. The activities provide a core workout emphasizing controlled movements rather than overexertion. It is currently the second best selling video game in history with 22.6 million copies sold as of December 30, 2009. The Wii console as well as the Wii Fit and many other games and accessories are easy to find as they are available at most stores that sell video games. It is relatively easy to use and it can be done alone or with friends and family members. You will also find it is becoming a very popular activity at senior residences and care facilities and even if we are physically challenged you can benefit from playing the Wii.

Regardless of your activity level, you should never be too busy to develop good nutritional habits as these are also important to a healthy lifestyle. Many studies have documented the link between a healthy diet and prevention of age-related or chronic diseases. As you age, your body and its responses to food change. Decreases in metabolism, intensity in your taste and smell senses, some changes in how your body processes food, and overall slower digestion are just a few of the likely alterations. One of the first steps to good nutrition, choosing the right foods and insuring a balanced diet is to learn to read and understand food labels.

Much of how a product is packaged is simply a ploy to get you to buy the product...it is called *Marketing*. Words like “Hormone-Free”, “Guilt-Free”, “Natural”, and “High in Antioxidants” are examples of words not regulated by the Food & Drug Agency (FDA). Pay particular attention to the standardized label titled *Nutrition Facts*. Some of the basics you should pay attention to are:

- **Ingredients:** the listing is arranged in order by weight with the first listed having the greatest amount to the last having the smallest quantity. This information is not on the *Nutrition Facts* label but most often either below it or next to it.
- **Calories:** “Low-calorie” means 40 calories or less per serving whereas “Calorie-free” means less than 5 calories per serving.
- **Dates:** Don’t eat any food that is past its “Use-by” date even if it looks and smells okay; however, there is some leeway with the “Best-before” date.
- **Fats:** Avoid saturated and trans-fats as these are not good for you

Would you like to learn more about the Wii and food labels? The third Tuesday of the month the Delta College 50+...*Just Like Gold Program* has a “Bits and Bites” program (a bite to eat first then a bit of information about a subject that is of interest to those of us 50+ in age). The Tuesday, March 16, 2010 meeting will be about these topics. You are invited to join us but please call in advance as reservations are necessary and there is a small charge for food. If you become a member of the Delta College 50+...*Just Like Gold Program* you will pay reduced fees for the monthly meeting as well as all other programs.

Healthy aging is also about maintaining your zest for life, having a sense of purpose, staying connected socially, continuing your learning, and looking for joy in living! Join us.

Sue Montesi
Dean of Learning Centers and Innovative Programs
Delta College