

Senior Health | Your Guide to Aging Gracefully

Dr. Astrid Mickens-Williams

Longevity is an invaluable gift of nature if utilized to the maximum and can yield fruitful results, if we pay heed to it 'now'. How long you live, how youthful you look, and how great you feel depends on you. Getting old does not necessarily indicate bad news. It means another year of productivity and time to spend doing the things you enjoy the most. You can grow old with your self-esteem, confidence and a sense of adventure, if you discover the secrets of wise and healthy living. Life should be determined much by its content rather than its length. Therefore, life should be led purposefully and passionately till the last breath.

Science has made great strides forward in understanding of just what aging is, how it works, and most important of all — what we can do about it. We can reduce diseases of aging and prolong our health and vital years. Over 85% of the debilitating diseases of old age result from only a handful of diseases — cancer, coronary artery disease, stroke, diabetes, kidney failure, obstructive lung disease, pneumonia and influenza. Heart disease, by itself, accounts for fully one out of every two deaths of older Americans, and high blood pressure directly causes or contributes to 15% of all deaths. We now can control even these pathologies by our lifestyle. By the simple act of knowing what to eat, exercise, and live your life, you can lower your risk for these diseases of aging and incorporate this knowledge into your lifestyle, thus avoiding the causes of premature aging, debility and death.

Aging gracefully doesn't come without its heartaches and pains. Arthritis is major cause of pain among those growing old. An estimated 31 million Americans have been diagnosed with arthritis. And those are just the people who are smart enough to see their doctors about the annoying pain in their joints, tendons and muscles. Six million more suffer quietly, paying the price for a past sports injury, years of carrying around an extra 20 pounds or just bad luck. That is because despite its reputation for being a part of growing old, arthritis is an equal opportunity employer of pain. Many people are not surprised to hear that arthritis is a single leading cause of disability in people over age 45. But they are surprised to learn that it is the single leading cause of disability among all ages.

But arthritis ages more than just the body. Depression is almost universal among arthritis patients. But a lot of people with arthritis also get what is known as 'learned helplessness'. That occurs when someone starts out healthy and able to do things for himself, but over the years, as the pain gets worse, he is less able to take care of himself. Someone else must assume these functions, so the person with arthritis winds up more and becomes more helpless. In fact, some of the younger patients in nursing homes are people suffering from severe arthritis, who are there because of the inability to care for themselves.

So what are the signs and symptoms to look for? Most people know arthritis causes painful, stiff and sometimes swollen joints. But arthritis can also affect muscles and tendons, which may not swell but still hurt. And while technically there are more than 100 different forms of arthritis, the most common ones are 'osteoarthritis' and 'rheumatoid arthritis'. Osteoarthritis, the most common type, affects 16 million Americans. This is often caused or aggravated by athletic injury. That is not to say that if you play sports, you will get arthritis. But those who have experienced repeated injury to a joint, no matter how minor, have an increased chance of getting osteoarthritis. About 4 million American men and 12 million women have osteoarthritis, which results when cartilage in the joint deteriorates. Besides injury, this form of arthritis is caused by overweight or extra



stress on the joints. It is typically localized to a certain area, such as fingers, knees, feet, hips or back. The common symptoms are pain and stiffness in the joint. There are no systemic symptoms, such as fever or lung or skin complications. Rheumatoid arthritis is the most serious and most difficult to control, and it can do some of the worst damage to joints.

About 6.5 million people in United States suffer from this malady, and that includes twice as many women as men according to the Arthritis Foundation. It hits people between the ages of twenty and fifty. Although the effects may be felt in many joints, the most commonly stricken are the small joints of the hands. Inflammation and thickening of the tissue that lines the joints cause the person to experience pain and swelling. If the process continues uncontrolled, destruction of bones may result, with deformities and eventually severe disability. It is also a general disease, which may affect the lungs, blood vessels, skin, or even salivary glands.

You may not be able to prevent arthritis, but you can delay its aging effects. So even if you have never been bothered with arthritic pain, you are just beginning to feel some morning stiffness or evening pain or you have full-fledged arthritis, here are some key tips on how to deal with it:

1. **Lose weight:** Being overweight is a major risk factor, especially for arthritis of the knees and hips. Even when you are in your twenties and thirties, you should try to reduce your weight close to the normal range for your height. If you are 20% overweight or more, you are a prime candidate for osteoarthritis. But any weight loss helps. If you lose just 10 pounds and keep it off for 10 years, no matter what your current weight is you can cut your risk of osteoarthritis in your knees by 50%.

2. **Watch what you eat:** Various studies show that food plays a crucial role in the severity of arthritis. Norwegian researchers discovered that patients with rheumatoid arthritis showed dramatic improvements in their conditions within one month of beginning vegetarian diets. Other scientists have also found that omega-3 fatty acids, abundant in cold water fish such as salmon, herring and sardines, also ease rheumatoid arthritis pain.

3. **Reduce your fat intake:** A diet low in saturated fat and animal fat seems to be helpful. Eating a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables and non-red meat sources of fat such as fish and chicken may cause the body to produce fewer pro-inflammatory substances. This is not to say that this diet will cure arthritis, but it can modify the effects of arthritis.

4. **Keep in mind allergies:** Some people react to certain foods, almost like an allergy. It may result from wheat or citrus fruits, lentils or even alcohol. The problem is, there is no way to test this. But if you notice a significant reaction and more pain consistently within 48 hours after eating a certain food, eliminate it from your diet.

5. **Get physical:** Regular exercise to build your muscles and flexibility can keep osteoarthritis at bay or lessen its effects. Exercise is also recommended for rheumatoid arthritis, although workouts should be under a doctor's supervision and emphasize range-of-motion exercises. Exercise improves strength and flexibility, so less stress is placed on the joints, and they can move easier and more efficiently. Inactivity, on the other hand, actually encourages pain, stiffness and other symptoms.

6. **Develop a hobby:** Listen to music, cultivate a hobby which not only helps in the constructive use of time but also diverts the mind from pain. But most importantly, get out and enjoy life!

Inflammation | The Nutrition Connection

By Diane Wayne, MS, RD

New research is linking the root causes of diseases like heart disease, metabolic syndrome, type 2 diabetes, cancer, rheumatoid arthritis and neurological degeneration with chronic inflammation that can last for days, months, or years according (Environmental Nutrition, October 2009). The evidence shows that fighting chronic inflammation in our body is another reason to support eating healthy.

How can foods influence your level of inflammation? Diets high in refined starches, sugar, saturated fats and trans fats support an increase in the inflammatory response which is undesirable. A diet rich in healthy carbohydrates (fruits, vegetables, whole grains) and healthy fats and proteins is beneficial because they lower your inflammatory indicators. Soy products were also linked with lower inflammatory responses.

In addition to eating a variety of healthy foods, exercising more and drinking tea have a beneficial effect on inflammation. Processed foods (ex: cookies and sodas) and smoking are not beneficial because they support inflammation. Dr. Andrew Weil,

M.D., Director of Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona recommends planning your meals around plant-based foods instead of meat.

It's even more important to make healthier choices as we mature, because we still need our vitamins and minerals, but our metabolism slows down and we need fewer calories to maintain our weight. Eating more fruits and vegetables is a low calorie way to eat delicious foods that are high in phytochemicals and antioxidants that help fight diseases like cancer, heart disease, and improve many health problems like high blood pressure.

Remember to limit portions because too much of any food (including healthy foods) will add pounds to your waistline. Be sure to eat when you're hungry and stop when you're full. Listen to the voice inside everyone that tells us we are full. Your body always gives a natural signal to stop eating, but you must listen carefully to hear it.

Make the healthy choice to balance your health. For more information contact:

www.mypyramid.gov
www.championsforchange.net



www.nutrition.gov
www.wholegrainscouncil.org

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Ambassador for The Healthy Heritage Wellness Movement. The Healthy Heritage Movement, Inc. mission is to eliminate health disparities in African Americans by providing culturally relevant resources, peer navigations, and advocacy training.

HIV/AIDS | highest among seniors

By Maxwell Ohikhuare, M.D.

It is no secret that HIV and AIDS are threats to the African American community. As recently as August 2009, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released data showing that African Americans are over-represented in the population living with HIV/AIDS by almost four times their representation among the general population. HIV/AIDS statistics for African Americans living in San Bernardino County are not quite as disparate as those for the nation, but the trends are strikingly similar, and no less of a cause for

concern.

According to population projections published by the California Department of Finance, African Americans make up almost 10 percent of San Bernardino County's estimated 2.1 million residents. Over 27 percent of the county's 3,300 residents living with HIV/AIDS through the end of 2008 were African American, however African Americans account for a higher proportion of cases than would be expected given the make up of the population at large.

While the majority of

HIV/AIDS diagnoses occur in county residents under age 45, the older segment of the population is by no means safe from harm. About 25 percent of new HIV/AIDS diagnoses among African Americans in San Bernardino County occur among 45-64 year olds. African Americans in this age group are disproportionately affected at a slightly higher rate than African Americans overall; they make up only 9.5 percent of the total population age 45-64 but 30 percent of 45-64 year olds living with HIV/AIDS. The disparity is even more pronounced in African American

women aged 45-64, who account for 43 percent of all HIV-positive women aged 45-64 but only 10 percent of all female San Bernardino County residents in that age group.

There are a number of risk factors that may contribute to the disproportionate impact of HIV/AIDS on the African American community. Higher rates of injection drug use and sexually transmitted diseases, the stigma around HIV/AIDS and the risky behaviors traditionally associated with it, lack of awareness of one's own HIV status, and barriers to accessing healthcare and HIV

prevention services may all play a role to some degree.

Prevention of new HIV infections is of the utmost importance in combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic among African Americans in San Bernardino County. While information and education about HIV and its risk factors are essential to increasing the level of awareness among the African American population, community collaboration and outreach are equally vital components. The battle against HIV/AIDS cannot be won without the involvement of people whose communities are most impacted by the disease.