

healthkeys®

Fall 2013

Sharing your home can offer benefits

by Angela Menghraj, Contributing Editor

Distance from relatives, the loss of dear friends and a feeling one is rattling around all alone in the apartment are a few of the realities we can face as we age. The result is the specter of a lonely existence for the rest of our lives, which can spell depression. Add health challenges like the risk of falling or a nutrient-poor diet of mostly tea and toast and you hear a clarion call for realistic and safe solutions for older people who live alone.

The New York Foundation for Senior Citizens, financed by New York City's Department for the Aging and the State Office for Aging, may have the answer for older New Yorkers willing to give up some independence in exchange for welcoming a "guest" to live in their homes. This living arrangement provides a safety net for seniors who face housing insecurity and are at risk for social isolation. In addition to economic advantages and sharing household chores, having another person for conversation and support and a

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Vitamin D doesn't discriminate

Although African-American women produce less vitamin D in their skin via sun exposure than white women, they don't absorb less from vitamin D supplements. A recent study found that black women over age 75 who were deficient in the so-called sunshine vitamin didn't need a higher dose of vitamin D supplements than white women.

Sunlight is the primary source of vitamin D production, and people deficient in vitamin D can develop abnormalities in calcium, phosphorus and bone metabolism. Adults may also experience muscle weakness.

Because black women produce less vitamin D in their skin, researchers were curious if they would need higher dosages of vitamin D supplements when deficient in the vitamin. However, the results showed that the dosages for both white and black women should be the same. Researchers gave older black and white women of similar body types various doses of vitamin D and both had similar responses to their supplements.

Getting sufficient vitamin D is important for your overall health. You can increase your vitamin D by being out in the sun for about 10 minutes each day. You can also increase your vitamin D intake by consuming fortified foods, like milk or many breakfast cereals; fatty fish, such as salmon; or certain mushrooms.



When cholesterol won't budge

Eating a heart-healthy diet, engaging in moderate-intensity activity, avoiding smoking—all can help lower high cholesterol.

Unfortunately, not everyone will be able to manage cholesterol by making these changes alone.

If your cholesterol numbers remain high, your doctor will likely recommend cholesterol medications. Although the idea of taking a pill long term can be scary, medications are usually successful at getting heart-damaging cholesterol under control.

They include:

- **Statins**, which help prevent the liver from making cholesterol and help to boost good HDL cholesterol.
- **Selective cholesterol absorption inhibitors** work to keep the intestines from absorbing cholesterol.
- **Resins (aka bile acid sequestrant or bile acid-binding drugs)** help boost the body's ability to remove cholesterol.
- **Fibrates, niacin and omega-3 fatty acids** are among other therapies used to help control cholesterol.



Cut your stroke risk one cup at a time

Coffee and tea are the most popular drinks in the world after water, and for good reason. Aside from providing a sometimes much-needed pick-me-up, regular coffee and green tea drinkers may also enjoy a decreased stroke risk with their morning brews, says a new study.

According to a study of 83,000 people published in *Stroke: Journal of the American Heart Association*, people who drank at least one cup of coffee a day had about a 20 percent lower risk of stroke compared to those who rarely drank it. Green tea drinkers had to consume more to see the same benefits, though: Those who drank two to three cups of green tea daily had a 14 percent lower risk, while those who drank four cups daily had a 20 percent lower risk.

Researchers believe compounds found in green tea, called catechins, may provide protection from strokes because they produce an antioxidant anti-inflammatory effect. Coffee contains chlorogenic acid, which lowers the risk of type 2 diabetes, thereby cutting stroke risk.



Preventing falls

What you can do to reduce your risk

Each year, more than a third of seniors fall, says the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In addition, those who fall once are two to three times more likely to fall again. Injuries from falls are responsible for significant disability, loss of independence and reduced quality of life.

If you're an older adult (or provide care for a family member who is), fall intervention studies show that taking preventive steps can help prevent falls and maintain independence.

HOME SAFETY

Preventing falls is especially important as autumn turns into winter—the most notorious season for accidental falls due to ice and snow in some areas of the country and greater inactivity. Follow these safety tips for

Fall techniques

If you do fall, lessen the impact with these tips:

- 1 When falling forward, turn your head to one side to avoid a direct hit to your face or nose. Open your palms to the floor to protect your wrists.
- 2 When falling sideways, tuck your chin to your chest and keep elbows close to your body.
- 3 Be prepared to fall in a crouched position by bending at your knees and the waist. Your lower legs will hit first, protecting your hips.

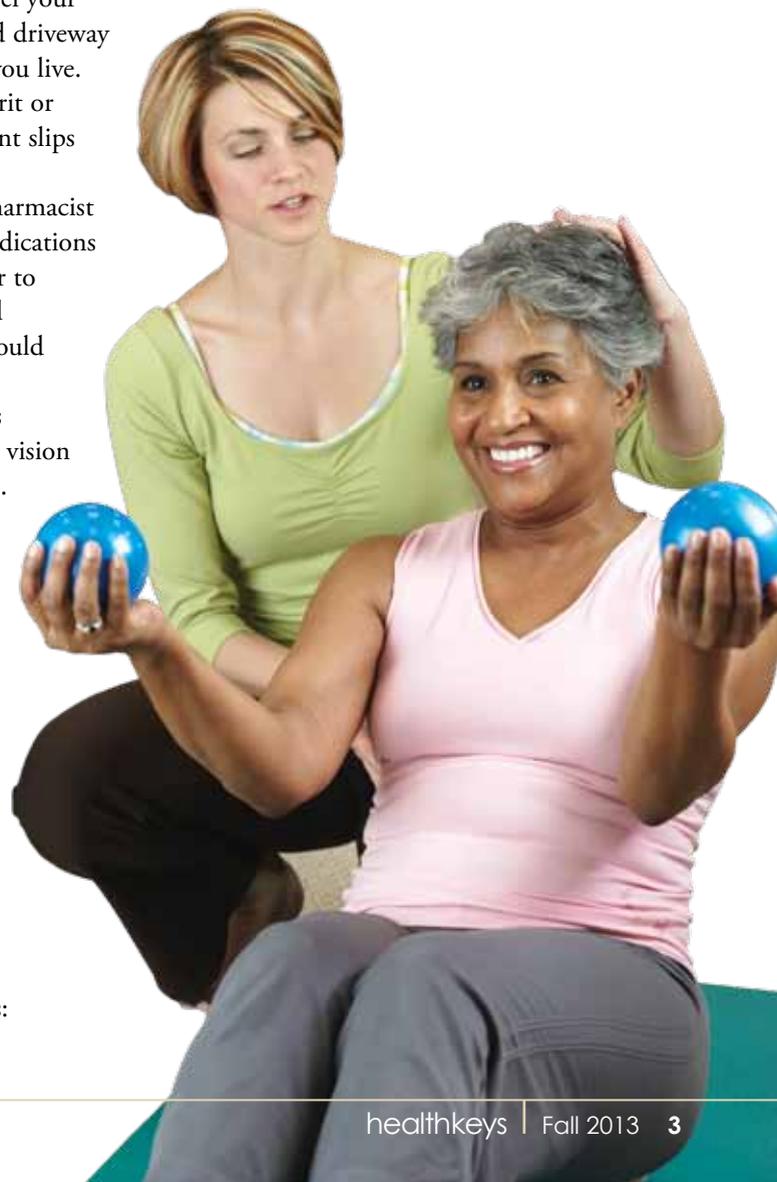
making your home and property safer:

- Remove throw rugs, electrical cords and piles that could trip you up.
- Keep your driveway and sidewalks clear of leaves and other debris. Repair cracks, lips or dips.
- Once winter arrives, consider hiring a snow removal service or a neighbor to shovel your sidewalk, steps and driveway if it snows where you live. Spread rock salt, grit or sand to help prevent slips and falls.
- Have your pharmacist review all your medications several times a year to check for potential interactions that could trigger dizziness.
- Get your eyes checked. Impaired vision contributes to falls.

STAY ACTIVE

Seniors who are less active during the fall and winter seasons experience higher levels of instability. Activity helps you to maintain balance and build muscle strength. Here are some tips:

- Move your walking regimen indoors to continue it year-round. Fitness clubs and shopping malls are great places to keep moving.
- Build core muscle strength and strengthen your thigh muscles by exercising or attending fitness classes. Weakness from underuse of the quads and lack of physical strength are major contributors to falls. **HK**



It's flu shot time!



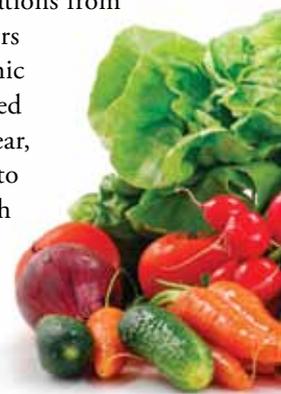
Angie, Mary and Tom were having coffee when Mary began coughing and sneezing. A couple of days later both Angie and Tom came down with the same symptoms, including a fever and intense muscle aches.

Face it—catching the flu simply isn't fun. Flu is most commonly spread when people cough or sneeze virus-infected droplets into the air. Even worse, the flu can lead to pneumonia and other dangerous complications. Anywhere from 3,000 to 49,000 Americans—the majority being the very young and seniors—die every year from complications related to the flu.

WHO AND WHEN?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an annual flu shot is recommended for everyone 6 months and older. It's especially important to get the vaccine if you, someone you live with or someone you care for is at high risk of complications from the flu, such as seniors and those with chronic conditions. You'll need a flu vaccine every year, since a shot's ability to protect wears off with time, and flu strains mutate continually.

There are two types of vaccines: a



Getting vaccinated typically **reduces your chances** of catching the flu by **about 60 percent**.

flu shot and a nasal spray. The shot, given by needle, is approved for use in people older than 6 months. The nasal spray is delivered by a mist sprayed in the nose and is approved for healthy people ages 2 to 49. It's not approved for pregnant women.

It's a good idea to get vaccinated in early fall—before flu season is in full swing—since early immunization is the most effective. However, because flu season typically peaks in January or February and can sometimes continue into May, it's still a good idea to get the shot even beyond the autumn months.

OTHER PREVENTION TIPS

In addition to a flu shot, you can enhance your immune system's ability to fight influenza by eating a nutritious diet rich in fruits and vegetables, exercising regularly and managing stress. Avoiding tobacco and alcohol will also give your body the best chance at remaining healthy. Washing your hands regularly with soap and water and avoiding sick people can help stop the spread of germs.

Consult your doctor if you or a family member has health issues that could affect immunization against the flu or if you have any specific questions. 



Sharing your home ...

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sense of safety can make a big difference in the quality of life for an older person. While it's not easy to open your home to a stranger, a wise person might consider this thought: "A stranger is a friend you haven't met yet."

This free service matches homeowners or renters who have extra rooms with people looking for a compatible living arrangement. The prospective individual may be younger or disabled. Renting does not preclude home sharing. A landlord may not lawfully restrict occupancy of an apartment only to the tenant named on the lease.

And there are support systems to help keep the living arrangement running smoothly. Referrals to social services and mediation can be made should a dispute arise.

There are variations to home sharing. Project Share located in Staten Island offers shared living in which a small number of seniors live in a large agency-rented house or apartment. Each person has a private room and shares common living spaces.

With the high cost of living in New York City, it may be a good idea for some seniors to explore this housing alternative.

For more information and how to apply, call: New York Foundation for Senior Citizens Home Sharing Program: **212-962-7559**
Project Share: **718-816-1811** 

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Quick quiz

Test your health savvy

When it comes to your health, the more you know the better. Test your knowledge by answering true or false below.

True or False:

- 1** A woman's risk of osteoporosis increases before age 20.
- 2** One in three people older than 60 and half of those older than 85 have hearing loss.
- 3** Believe it or not, physical activity increases your risk of developing diabetes.
- 4** Lack of sleep is associated with several chronic diseases, including diabetes and depression.

1 False. A woman has acquired most of her skeletal mass by age 20. Decline in bone mass occurs for women around the time of menopause.

2 True. If you think you have a hearing problem, your doctor may refer you to an otolaryngologist—a doctor who specializes in ear, nose and throat conditions. He or she can help you find what's causing the hearing loss and determine the best treatment options.

3 False. Being overweight or obese is a leading risk factor for type 2 diabetes. A recent study found that 30 minutes of physical activity five days a week and eating a healthy diet can help delay or possibly prevent diabetes.

4 True. Insufficient sleep has been linked to the development of a number of chronic illnesses, including diabetes, heart disease, obesity and depression, and can complicate the management of these diseases.



Help for chronic pain

For people living with chronic pain (persistent pain that lasts for several months or years), it's common to wonder why and feel hopeless or helpless in the daily struggle with pain. You might ask, what caused this pain? Chronic pain can occur due to a disease or condition, past injuries or for no known reason at all. Or, when will it go away? While chronic pain sometimes resolves with time, in many cases treatment can help manage symptoms.

TREATMENT STRATEGIES

Treatment for chronic pain may include a combination of medication, therapy, lifestyle changes and coping strategies.

Medicines that may be used for chronic pain include over-the-counter pain relievers (acetaminophen, aspirin, ibuprofen), prescribed narcotics, antidepressants and/or anticonvulsive medicines. When taken as directed by your doctor, medications can be a safe and effective way to manage pain.

Therapy can help you manage pain and maintain your mobility and flexibility:

>> Physical therapy uses stretching and strengthening activities to help you move with greater flexibility and less pain.

>> Occupational therapy trains you to do ordinary tasks differently to reduce painful movements.

>> Behavioral therapy can help you learn ways to relax and decrease stress.

>> Alternative therapies such as yoga, massage and acupuncture may also provide relief.

Lifestyle changes include eating well, getting regular sleep at night and doing low-impact exercise, such as walking or swimming. If you smoke, quitting can greatly improve your health and may also help your medications work better, because the nicotine in cigarettes can make some medicines less effective.

Coping strategies, such as relaxation, deep breathing and meditation techniques help relieve stress—and pain. Relaxing the body and taking your mind off the pain can actually alter your body's production of chemicals that produce pain. 

Mammograms: Helping to save lives

Screenings are the best way to catch breast cancer early, in its most treatable stages. Exams such as mammograms are able to find cancer when it is very small and often before symptoms are present. As technology continues to improve, screenings may help to save thousands of lives each year. Talk with your doctor about a recommended screening schedule that's right for you.

SCREENINGS YOU NEED

The first screening you can do is often the easiest. You may choose to perform your own breast self-exam on a regular basis. It's important to look for any abnormal lumps, swelling, skin irritation or redness. If any changes occur, you should see your doctor as soon as possible.

Regular screenings for women of all ages include a clinical breast exam, or CBE. The American Cancer Society recommends that women ages 40 and older have a CBE annually. A CBE is done by a health professional and allows an opportunity for you to talk

specifically about your personal risk of developing breast cancer.

Women in their 40s and older have an increased risk of breast cancer. The American Cancer Society recommends a mammogram every year, regardless of a woman's health or family history. A mammogram is an X-ray of the breast, which takes a picture of breast tissue to screen for any abnormalities that might suggest cancer. In addition, your doctor may recommend a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) screening. MRI scans use a magnet and radio waves to create a more detailed image of the breast. 



Health dollars & sense

Want to cut medical expenses without compromising your health? Try the following tips to help keep your costs in check.

Getting out of the doughnut hole

Every year, many people enrolled in the Medicare Part D prescription medication plan find themselves in the “doughnut hole,” a term that refers to the temporary gap in coverage that occurs when you and your drug plan have reached the initial coverage limit (\$2,970 in 2013) on covered medications. In the past, people under the plan were then responsible for the full cost of their medications until they reached the yearly out-of-pocket maximum of \$4,750.

But the Affordable Care Act is working to eliminate the doughnut hole. As of January 2013, people who reach \$2,970 in 2013 will then become responsible for 47.5 percent of the plan's cost—instead of the full amount—for covered brand-name medications until reaching the out-of-pocket maximum, and this percentage will decrease every year until it reaches 25 percent in 2020, at which point the doughnut hole will disappear.

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The best show in Isabella town!

by Angela Menghraj, Contributing Editor

What's exciting about Isabella's Summer Fest?

Every year, staff and residents gather for a day of wonderful festivity. This year, the Summer Fest was a carnival/circus held in the Garden and Recreation Hall. Both spaces transformed into a big tent full of all the activity of a neighborhood carnival.

Enthusiastic staff volunteers from different departments pooled ideas and talents to create a fantastic day of carnival fun reminiscent of childhood. One of Isabella's own, staff member DJ Casanova Brown, provided the music. A volunteer did face painting. Residents also participated in preparing for the carnival by painting the prop board used for the photo booth clown cut out. An artist painted windows in the corridor of the Hall.

The day began with the beat of drums, the twirling of batons and the sounds of brass as members of the

New York Stars Twirling and Marching Band, a Washington Heights-based nonprofit organization, came down the midway in the Recreation Hall.

The audience lined both sides of the hall and welcomed the young people with clapping and marching in place. Some residents, with the help of staff, came dressed in costumes, hats, wigs and funny glasses. This added to the festive atmosphere; residents loved it!

Little tykes from Child Day Care visited residents who remained in their rooms. Everyone was delighted to see smiling clowns appearing with the children, who gave out lollipops and carnival tickets. The children enjoyed a good time under the tent, painting murals, playing games such as "fishing," and "hot potato," while midway games included "pitch-out," "bowling" and more. One of the highlights was the dunking tank, where residents could release a trap door to dunk employee



The New York Stars Twirling & Marching Band entertained at Isabella's Summer Fest.

volunteers by deftly throwing a ball at the target.

Under the big tent, carnival treats like cotton candy, popcorn, ice cream, churros and cookies were available throughout the day.

And what is a carnival without a fun house, complete with a slide show, funny mirrors, music and games? Future Echoes, the multi-talented entertainment group, performed movie skits and played trivia.

And as if all this wasn't enough, the hilarious Stilt Walkers entertained in the finale. It was a grand day for both Isabella residents and staff who made it all possible. Caring comes in many ways and this year's carnival was an exciting example of Isabella's commitment to caring with fun! 