

# healthkeys®

Spring 2013

## The other side of retirement

by Angela Menghraj, Contributing Editor

One, two, three years and then you can leave your job and begin a new, exciting phase of life filled with possibilities! That's the aspect of retirement we see advertised in commercials. Let's do a reality check. What actually happens in retirement? Are we ready? For the good times, of course, but for the less than good?

The time after retirement can also be a time of loss. Big losses like a parent's death, poor investment returns, the loss of a home, a decline in health. Rather than becoming depressed about what might happen and surrendering our normally positive outlook to morbid preoccupation, we can take inventory of the personal (not financial) survival skills that we have acquired over the years. These time-honored skills can get us through the hard times.

Viktor Frankl, a psychotherapist, experienced the horrors of a concentration camp during World War II. In his book "Man's Search for Meaning," he tells us the last free choice we have is choosing our attitude in any given situation. He used his therapeutic skills to encourage fellow prisoners to find a reason for living. For Frankl, it was the

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2 Health news you can use

4 Control your high blood pressure

6 Know the signs of skin cancer



## What's the beef?

**A juicy, pan-fried steak can sure hit the spot.** But that delicious piece of red meat may actually increase your risk of prostate cancer by up to 40 percent. A new study examined the data of nearly 2,000 men involved in a prostate cancer study and asked them questions about the types of meat and poultry they ate, how they cooked it and how well-done they liked their meat. The results showed that men who ate more than 1.5 servings of pan-fried meat per week increased their risk of advanced prostate cancer

by 30 percent, and those who ate more than 2.5 servings per week increased the risk by 40 percent.

Researchers hypothesize that the increased risk results from cancer-causing chemicals that are formed when sugars and amino acids are cooked at higher temperatures for longer periods of time. To lower your cancer risk, limit the amount of fat you consume from animal sources, and instead eat plenty of fruits and vegetables and foods such as whole grains and beans.



## Non-alcoholic wine better for heart health?

**While plenty of research shows a glass of red wine may improve heart health, here's something you probably didn't know.** The same antioxidants in red wine that have been shown to decrease blood pressure—called polyphenols—exist in non-alcoholic wine, too. What's more, varieties without alcohol may even be better when it comes to heart health, according to a small study published in *Circulation Research*.

Researchers found, after looking at 67 men at high risk for cardiovascular disease, that non-alcoholic red wine was more effective at lowering blood pressure than traditional red wine.

Researchers noted that traditional and non-alcoholic red wine contained equal amounts of polyphenols, but that alcohol likely weakened their ability to lower blood pressure. The study found that non-alcoholic red wine lowered the participants' blood pressure enough to potentially reduce risk of heart disease by 14 percent and stroke by as much as 20 percent.

It's important to understand that although moderate wine drinking may be good for your heart, too much may pose health risks to other parts of the body, such as the liver, negating the benefits to your heart.



## The battle of the salts: Table or sea?

**What's the difference between sea salt and table salt, you might ask?** While sea salt has grown in popularity due to its crunchy texture and strong flavor, when it comes to the one item that affects our hearts the most—sodium content—it's no different than ordinary table salt. Despite popular belief—61 percent of people surveyed by the American Heart Association (AHA) believe that sea salt has less sodium and is therefore healthier—both sea salt and table salt contain 40 percent sodium.

So if you're unsure which to choose, it really comes down to a matter of taste. Either way, the AHA recommends a daily intake of no more than 1,500 milligrams of sodium.



# Keep your kidneys healthy

Regular checkups and screenings help detect kidney disease

Your kidneys have an important job to do. They filter your blood and help extra water and waste leave your body. When kidneys aren't working well, waste can build up in the blood and hurt your body's ability to function.

Because there are no symptoms of early kidney disease, you may not even know you have it. And if kidney disease progresses or gets worse without treatment, it can lead to kidney failure. Someone with kidney failure usually needs to have dialysis (when a machine is used to clean and filter blood several times a week) or a kidney transplant.

## ARE YOU AT RISK?

Having high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease or a family

history of kidney failure can raise your risk for getting kidney disease.

### >> Do you have high blood pressure?

Controlling high blood pressure and reducing the salt in your diet can help keep your kidneys healthy. For tips on controlling high blood pressure, visit the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's website: [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp).

### >> Do you have diabetes?

Managing your diabetes and keeping blood sugar levels under control can help protect your kidneys. For tips on managing diabetes, visit the National Diabetes




Education Program's website: [www.ndep.nih.gov](http://www.ndep.nih.gov).

### >> Do you have heart disease?

Keeping your heart healthy can also help your kidneys stay healthy. For tips on preventing and managing heart disease, visit the American Heart Association's website: [www.heart.org/gettinghealthy](http://www.heart.org/gettinghealthy).

Talk to your doctor to learn more about managing health conditions you may have.

## A SIMPLE TEST

Kidney disease can be treated and managed when it's detected early. That's why it's important to be screened for kidney disease. All it takes is a simple blood and urine test to check for kidney disease. People who are at risk for kidney disease should talk to their doctors about getting tested every year. 

## 10 ways to protect your kidneys

The National Kidney Disease Education Program suggests these tips for protecting your kidneys:

- 1 Control high blood pressure.
- 2 Keep your blood glucose levels in the target range if you have diabetes.
- 3 Keep your cholesterol levels in the target range.
- 4 Choose fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy foods.
- 5 Limit salt in your daily diet.
- 6 Limit beverages containing alcohol.
- 7 If you smoke, make a plan to quit.
- 8 Be physically active and maintain your ideal weight.
- 9 Take your medicines as prescribed.
- 10 See your doctor for regular checkups, and ask about getting your blood and urine tested for kidney disease.

# Take control of high blood pressure

**D**o you have high blood pressure? According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), almost one-third of Americans do. Half of them don't have it under control; others don't know they have a problem.

To be fair, high blood pressure (or "hypertension") is a stealth foe. Though your numbers may be high, there's usually no sign that anything is amiss. While you go about your life, the condition slowly damages your arteries, setting the scene for complications. In fact, having high blood pressure makes you four times more likely to die from a stroke and three times more likely to die from heart disease, say CDC statistics.

The only way to know whether you have high blood pressure is to have it measured. Most likely, your blood

pressure is recorded every time you go to your health care provider's office. Normal blood pressure readings are less than 120/80 mm Hg, while high blood pressure means a consistent reading of 140/90 mm Hg or more. In between those numbers is an area called "pre-hypertension." This label indicates that while your readings aren't high enough to classify you as having high blood pressure, they should still be a cause for concern and a wake-up call to make changes to lower your numbers, as you could develop full-blown hypertension down the road.

If your numbers are good, your provider may recommend getting screened every two years. If not, he or she may recommend more frequent checkups or home monitoring.

## DO YOU RECOGNIZE THESE RISK FACTORS?

Certain risk factors for high blood pressure can't be changed. As you age, your numbers tend to start the upward climb. African-Americans and people with a family history of hypertension also face a greater risk. But there are even more factors that you can do something about. These include:

>> **Carrying excess pounds.** Being overweight or obese increases the amount of blood your body needs, which puts added stress on your cardiovascular system. What you can do: Eat a low-fat diet that's loaded with fruits, vegetables and whole grains and exercise regularly.

>> **Using tobacco products.** They increase your blood pressure right off the bat and also contain chemicals that damage your cardiovascular system. Nonsmokers also face higher blood pressure from just breathing in secondhand smoke. What you can do: Simply put, quit. Of course, it's not that simple, so try enlisting the help of your health care provider, who can offer you quit-smoking options such as nicotine replacement therapy and medication.

>> **Skipping exercise.** Being sedentary increases the risk of weight problems and typically ends up raising your blood pressure. What you can do: Shoot for 30 minutes of exercise daily.

>> **Consuming too much salt and drinking too much alcohol.** Excess sodium causes fluid retention (and higher blood pressure), while more than two drinks a day can not only increase your blood pressure, but also damage your heart. What you can do: Depending on your current health, decreasing sodium intake may limit you

## Understanding your readings

**Y**our systolic pressure, or the top number of your reading, is the pressure in the arteries as the heart beats. Your diastolic pressure, or the bottom number, is a measurement of the pressure in the arteries as the heart muscle rests. If you have blood pressure in two categories, your blood pressure is always the higher of the two numbers.

Blood pressure category	Systolic reading (in mm Hg)	Diastolic reading (in mm Hg)
Normal	Less than 120	Less than 80
Prehypertension	120–139	80–89
High blood pressure (stage one)	140–159	90–99
High blood pressure (stage two)	160–179	100–109
Hypertensive crisis	180 or higher	110 or higher



to 1,500 mg a day. For those who drink, men should limit alcohol to no more than two drinks a day, women and those over age 65, one drink.

**>> Not consuming enough potassium.**

Inadequate amounts of potassium can lead to a sodium buildup in your blood. What you can do: For most adults, the recommended daily intake is about 4,700 mg a day. Find it in a host of foods, including sweet potatoes, spinach, bananas and tuna. Always talk with your provider before increasing your potassium intake.

**>> Being stressed.** The significant rise in blood pressure readings may not be long term, but stress can lead to unhealthy behaviors, such as drinking alcohol or weight gain. What you can do: Engage in relaxing activities, such as meditation or deep breathing exercises, and work on ways to cope with stressful situations.

**>> Having health conditions.** Sleep apnea, diabetes and high cholesterol are just some of the health issues that can also impact your blood pressure numbers. What you can do: Work with your health care provider to make sure you're being properly treated. If your blood pressure isn't controlled through lifestyle measures, medication will likely be needed. HK

## The other side of retirement

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memory of his wife. We recently saw many New Yorkers, perhaps ourselves among them, exemplify the decisive choice of getting up, brushing themselves off with courageous determination to rebuild a home, go to work or extend themselves to neighbors during Hurricane Sandy. Because life makes no promises, we can only school ourselves in ways of thinking that support us in even the most trying times.

Another resource we can bring to life in retirement is our energy, whether it be robust or reserved. It may be that after a good night's sleep and a hearty breakfast our energy is at its peak. That's a good time to plan activities, make phone calls or tackle an unpleasant task. A nap after lunch followed by 20 minutes of moderate exercise can be just the thing to bring us through the rest of the day with energy.

Third, staying connected to family and friends keeps us in touch with those we love. We don't need to wait for a return phone call or feel it necessary to plan a movie or lunch date. It feels great just to have a long conversation without ending it with, "We must get together." In times like these, when those we care about may live far away, we'll be just as happy to know what's happening with our children and grandchildren and that all is well. They will be grateful for this sign of affection—even across the miles—and we'll be making use of our most powerful and enduring resource, our expression of love for one another. Truly, this is a resource that knows no limits—no matter our health or our age. HK

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### VISIONS

VISIONS/Services for the Blind & Visually Impaired is an 87-year-old nonprofit organization that provides free services for blind and visually impaired people. Join us Monday, March 18, 10 a.m.–noon, to learn more about general vision loss and prevention and how you can receive help. Call Marilyn Pacheco at **212-342-9224** for more information.

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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 with this quick quiz.

### True or False:

- 1 A comedy flick is the best type of movie for heart health.
- 2 People who don't sleep enough are more likely to develop heart disease than those who do.
- 3 Contrary to popular belief, stress actually lowers blood pressure.
- 4 Juan Mann invented the artificial heart.

- 1 **True.** Sad or intense movies have a negative effect on blood flow, according to a study published in the medical journal *Heart*. Funny movies have a positive effect on blood flow similar to that of aerobic exercise.
- 2 **True.** One hour more of sleep per night helped decrease the odds of calcium deposits in the coronary arteries, according to a recent study. Calcium deposits build up like plaque and can increase heart attack risk.
- 3 **False.** Blood pressure can rise as a response to stress. Once the stress disappears, blood pressure returns to normal. But frequent temporary spikes can affect blood vessels, the heart and kidneys much like persistent high blood pressure.
- 4 **False.** Juan Mann gained recognition after appearing on "The Oprah Winfrey Show" for giving free hugs. The feeling of well-being inspired by hugs is attributed to the hormone oxytocin, which can lower heart rate and blood pressure.



# Be on the alert for skin cancer

Your risk of developing skin cancer increases with age, which is why it becomes more important to have regular skin cancer screenings and to stay informed about skin cancer symptoms as you grow older.

### TYPES OF SKIN CANCER

Skin cancer falls into two primary categories: nonmelanoma and melanoma. Nonmelanoma skin cancers (basal and squamous cell cancers) are the more common and less deadly of the two types. They generally form in the top layer of skin in areas routinely exposed to sunlight. They may take different forms, including a scaly reddish patch, a pearly or waxy bump or an open sore.

Melanomas are less common than nonmelanomas, but are the leading cause of skin cancer-related deaths. A melanoma can appear on normal skin or may begin as a mole or birthmark that changes in appearance. They also tend to form on parts of the body with high exposure to sunlight.

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF SKIN CANCER?

A good way to check for potentially dangerous growths that may be melanoma is to look at the 'ABCDEs' or, the asymmetry, borders, colors, diameter and evolution of the growth. Ask yourself the following questions as you do so:

>> **Asymmetry.** Is half of the mole or growth different?

- >> **Borders.** Are the edges of the growth irregular?
- >> **Color.** Do the colors of the growth vary?
- >> **Diameter.** Is the growth larger than 6 millimeters in diameter?
- >> **Evolution.** Is the mark constantly changing?

Symptoms of nonmelanoma skin cancer to look out for include a sore that bleeds easily and doesn't heal, irregular vessels in or around a sore, or a sore with a depression in the middle. If you notice a growth, mole or birthmark with these symptoms, it's a good idea to have it looked at by your health care provider.

### WHO'S AT RISK?

Although skin cancer can occur in young people, the risk of developing it increases as you age. Other factors that may increase your risk include:

- having fair skin, eyes and hair pigmentation
- being exposed to large amounts of sunlight
- experiencing one or more blistering sunburns as a child
- using tanning devices
- having a relative who's developed skin cancer

Becoming familiar with the risks and symptoms of skin cancer can help with early detection and keep you healthy. Talk to your doctor if you have questions or concerns about potentially cancerous growths or about your risk for skin cancer.

# The power of volunteering

If someone told you they knew how you could reduce stress, improve your physical and mental health, live longer and be more satisfied with your life, would you try it? More than 64 million people already have, and it's not a secret—it's volunteering.

In fact, if you're age 60 or better, you stand to reap the most benefits from volunteering. Studies have shown that older volunteers experience more significant physical and mental health improvements than younger volunteers.

## VOLUNTEERING 101

You can give back to your community in many ways. The top four volunteering activities include fundraising, collecting or distributing food, providing general labor or transportation and tutoring. Local organizations, including your local hospital, may offer volunteering opportunities in your community. However, for even more volunteering opportunities, take stock of your own skills and interests to find the best fit for you:


### Find your fit

Resources for volunteering opportunities:

- [www.Serve.gov](http://www.Serve.gov)
- [www.VolunteeringInAmerica.gov](http://www.VolunteeringInAmerica.gov)
- [www.NationalService.gov](http://www.NationalService.gov)

**Fast fact:** More than 64 million volunteers donated 8.1 billion hours in 2010, worth \$173 billion!

- Do you have a special skill, like writing, that might help an organization?
- Do you have unique contacts with people in different industries?
- Are you interested in working with pets, children, veterans or older adults?
- Would you prefer to work on community improvement activities, like planting flowers or picking up trash?
- How active would you like to be while volunteering?
- Would you like to travel for volunteering opportunities?

After you've determined how you can best serve an organization as a volunteer, contact local groups seeking volunteers to find out what their needs are. 



## Health dollars & sense

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

### Worried sick about debt?


With the current economy, the stress of having too much debt can be a pain in the neck. But did you realize that it can also—literally—be a pain in the back, head and stomach? A poll found that people with higher levels of stress due to debt had more health problems than those without much stress from debt.

Try these tips to keep your debt load and stress level in check:

- **Create a realistic budget.** Write down everything you spend for a couple of months, then look for places to trim expenses.
- **Contact your creditors if you're having trouble making payments.** It may be uncomfortable, but dealing with financial woes head on is the best way to keep them from escalating.
- **Seek expert help.** A reputable credit-counseling agency can help you analyze your situation and find a way to pay off debt. They may be able to negotiate better rates and terms with your creditors.
- **Learn healthy ways to deal with stress.** You may have other pressures in your life, too, such as work or family. Handling stress in a healthy manner—and steering clear of counterproductive strategies such as abusing alcohol, overeating or isolating yourself—can help keep stress from affecting your health.

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## A literary venture for Isabella House

by Angela Menghraj, Contributing Editor

Isabella House, situated on the grounds of Isabella Geriatric Center in upper Manhattan, offers independent living for individuals ages 62 and older. People who live in Isabella House bring a variety of rich personal experiences and talents to this innovative environment.

Keeping up with this vital and enterprising community keeps everyone young. One of the attributes of life at Isabella House is a willingness to provide programs and opportunities that meet the ever-growing interests of our residents.

For example, a number of residents enjoy creative writing classes; some truly committed souls have volunteered to use their literary talents to develop the first Isabella House Magazine. It's a new and exciting venture undertaken by several residents who make up the editorial board. They are assisted by Angela Menghraj (consultant).

### Who are the editors?

- Louise Alexander brings many years as an educator and nurse.



The Editorial Committee members of Isabella House Magazine at work.

She also produced a community publication, The Beacon Magazine, for the Castle Hill Senior Center in the Bronx.

- Elaine Grabel is a poet and writer. She has worked in publishing for many years at John Wiley & Sons and Doubleday. As a judge for the Northeastern Job Corps, Elaine evaluated essays of participants for the annual competition for 10 years.

- William Hamilton is a former editor of and contributor to the Jane Austen Society of North America newsletter. He was a teacher in adult

education with concentration in writing.

- Donald Lortie has an extensive background in computer technology. He's participated in a number of writing classes and workshops in Isabella. He also is an essayist with special expertise in unusual scientific topics.

After announcing the upcoming magazine, the board solicited contributions from residents who enjoy writing their own articles, poems and essays. Other residents enthusiastically began contributing their work.

Isabella House Magazine published its first quarterly issue this winter. Isabella House residents continue to be engaged in refreshing, life-affirming activities in which they use their rich array of talents. After all, there is so much life in individuals of all ages.

If you're interested in obtaining a copy of Isabella House Magazine, email [isbellahouse@isabella.org](mailto:isbellahouse@isabella.org) or call Angela Menghraj at **212-342-9389**. 