Increasing Wellness during Middle-Age Adulthood

by Sharon H. Thompson, Ed.D., CHES
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How would you like to increase your overall wellness, prevent disease and slow aging? All three of these can be achieved through wise nutritional choices. Often there is so much confusion about "what" to eat that we sometimes turn away from the information overload and just eat anything and everything that we want. Please do not choose this path because there is good news related to nutrition and aging. Our food choices can support wellness during adulthood.

Based on information from the Food and Nutrition Board, one's adult years can be divided into four stages: 19 to 30; 31 to 50; 51 to 70; and then beyond 70 years of age. The ages of 19 to 50 are denoted as young adulthood, 51 to 70 is referred to as middle-age adulthood and beyond 70 is known as older adulthood. Middle-age adulthood, those adults who fall into the 51 to 70 age range, have nutrient recommendations that differ from those both younger and older. The nutrient recommendations for middle-age adulthood are outlined here.

► VITAMIN D There is an increased need for vitamin D for the 51 to 70-year age group. Experts suggest we increase intake of this vitamin to 10 mcg/day in middle-age adulthood for bone health and to account for the effect of aging on the skin’s ability to convert vitamin D from the sun to an active form in our skin. Choose vitamin D-rich foods, such as milk, salmon or shrimp. One might also increase vitamin D in the body by choosing to go for a walk or bike ride on sunny days.

► CALCIUM Total calcium intake should be 1,200 mg/day in middle-age adulthood. Calcium needs increase for bone health and to account for decreased calcium absorption. To insure adequate calcium, consume three daily servings of calcium-rich foods such as cheese, yogurt and milk. Nondairy sources of calcium include broccoli, turnip greens and black-eyed peas. If low calcium intake is a problem due to lactose intolerance, supplements such as calcium citrate or calcium carbonate can be used to make up the difference. To increase absorption, choose a calcium supplement that also contains vitamin D.

► FIBER Fiber is an important part of the diet because it helps prevent hemorrhoids, diverticulosis (inflammation of the intestine) and constipation. Fiber recommendations actually decrease during middle-age adulthood due to lower energy intake. Men and women in the 51 to 70 age group should consume 30 and 21 grams of fiber already begun. It involved surveying local agencies, businesses and organizations that primarily or exclusively serve older adults and retirees, to include the kind of information the Senior Summit Committee thought would be most worthwhile for the purposes of a directory. The CSAAR revised a survey form it had used last year to collect information from 52 local senior services organizations, and re-sent the revised questionnaire to more than 200 organizations that serve older adults and retirees all across the Grand Strand. The results of that second mail-out are found in the new online Senior Services Directory.

We hope the directory will eventually include useful contact and services information about more than 100 agencies, businesses and organizations in our region. If you know of a senior services organization that should be included but is not – or if you represent a senior services organization that would like to be included – please contact the CSAAR Staff at (843) 349-4115 or 4116 or e-mail rjohnson1@coastal.edu. We'll be happy to send you a Senior Services Directory entry form and post your information online as soon as it is received at the CSAAR office.

Grand Strand Senior Services Directory Debuts

Mid-April is the target date for the debut of an important new resource for Grand Strand older adults and retirees, their caregivers, and the many agencies, businesses and organizations that serve them. The Grand Strand Senior Services Directory is now available online at www.coastal.edu/csaar/srservices, which can be easily reached from any Internet-connected computer at home, at work or at such frequently visited public facilities as libraries, Senior Centers and community centers.

More than a year in the making, the new online Senior Services Directory is the product of a joint effort by a group of representatives from various Grand Strand organizations that serve senior citizens who have been meeting regularly following the demise of the 2004 “Senior Summit” project. Given impetus by Paula Ellis of The Sun News and organized by Sheila Johnson of Horry-Georgetown Tech and others, the Senior Services Directory is the result of an exhaustive search of options for providing seniors and those who serve them with a “one-stop shop” for information about needed services.

Late in 2004, Reid Johnson and Rocky Cartisano of Coastal Carolina University’s Center for the Study of Aging and Active Retirement (CSAAR) volunteered to modify a project they had already begun. It involved surveying local agencies, businesses and organizations that primarily or exclusively serve older adults and retirees, to include the kind of information the Senior Summit Committee thought would be most worthwhile for the purposes of a directory. The CSAAR revised a survey form it had used last year to collect information from 52 local senior services organizations, and re-sent the revised questionnaire to more than 200 organizations that serve older adults and retirees all across the Grand Strand.

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Older adulthood and retirement is a period marked by the most free time of any age. But what do older adults and retirees actually do with all their free time? Many national studies suggest that each passing generation of retirees spends more free time in active pursuits than previous ones, and a recent study conducted by Coastal Carolina University's Center for the Study of Aging and Active Retirement (CSAAR) shows that Grand Strand seniors are no exception. Unlike national studies that mostly deal in generalities, however, the CSAAR study reveals in detail exactly how older adults and retirees in our area spend their time.

The 2004 CSAAR survey of over 1,000 Horry and Georgetown County adults aged 55 and above asked three basic questions on this subject: How many days per year do you spend participating in a list of 26 common activities? What activities would you like to participate in but presently do not? And, what obstacles or problems presently prevent you from participating in wanted activities?

By dividing the average number of days per year reported for each activity by 365, we can translate those data into percentages of free time spent on each particular type of activity. (Since one can obviously participate in more than one activity each day, the data sum is far more than 100 percent.) These results offer general support for national trends showing more seniors participating in active pursuits, but they also provide some surprises, both in some of the most popular activities and in some of the least popular activities. Here's what we found.

By far the most popular pastime is watching television, at 91.8 percent. While this is clearly a physically inactive pursuit, we don't know whether our seniors engage in more intellectually stimulating TV programming (such as the Discovery Channel, History Channel, National Geographic Channel, PBS, etc.) or less stimulating programming (like soap operas, formulaic sitcoms, pulp fiction movies, etc.).

In a surprisingly high second place comes using computers (67.9 percent). This finding directly contradicts some national trends which say that older adults are put off by new technologies and aren't willing to take the time and effort required to learn how to use computers. Our local seniors obviously find computers to be interesting, helpful, and very useful in their day to day lives.

Also in a surprisingly strong third place comes exercise in all its various forms (65.8 percent). This indicates that Grand Strand seniors may be aware of research that shows that regular low impact aerobic exercise – such as walking, bicycling, light workouts with weights, and range-of-motion activities – contribute directly not only to better physical fitness, but also to the maintenance of maximum brain health that determines intellectual sharpness.

Another surprise is found in fourth place, i.e., using the Internet (65.2 percent). Again, this flies in the face of “common wisdom” which asserts that cyberspace is populated primarily by the younger generations. Clearly, at least on the Grand Strand, a great many seniors are surfing the Web in pursuit of games, shopping, research and the many other services and pastimes offered online.

The next 10 activities are more predictable for this age group:
- 58.5 percent of respondents’ time was spent reading books
- 58.4 percent was spent in hobbies
- 54.2 percent was spent participating in recreational activities
- 37.5 percent was spent working in the yard or garden
- 35.6 percent was spent visiting others (friends, neighbors, relatives, etc.)
- 28.8 percent of their time was spent golfing or participating in other sports
- 26.6 percent was spent in some form of religious activities
- 23.3 percent was spent shopping
- 22.2 percent was spent at the beach, a unique form of individual and family enjoyment available in this area
- 21.6 percent of their time was spent eating out at the more than 1,500 restaurants across the Grand Strand

In 15th place, at a surprisingly high 19.2 percent, is working or service organizations (13.2 percent), volunteering for charities or service organizations (12.3 percent), working on home repair or remodeling (9.9 percent), traveling/taking trips (6.0 percent), job training (4.9 percent), attending cultural events and art exhibits (4.1 percent), attending shows and other attractions (3.8 percent), and fishing or hunting (2.7 percent).

At the very bottom of our list come two activities that are surprising for their lack of participation. Although they are both highly organized and publicized, only 1.6 percent of our respondents’ time was spent in Senior Center activities, and only 1.4 percent at community centers. This strongly suggests that senior and community centers either need to change their programs to attract more older adults and retirees, and/or they need to upgrade their publicity about what attractive activities they offer. As more and more older adults retire to the Grand Strand, we might expect these latter two percentages to markedly increase in the future.

continued on page 5
10 keys to smart aging

NOTE: This is the third in a series of articles on maintaining and even enhancing one’s intellectual abilities despite advancing age, based on very encouraging recent scientific research. Your questions or comments on this or any other Prime Times article are welcome by telephone, fax, e-mail or as a Letter to the Editor to the CSAAR office. (Back issues of Prime Times are also available from the CSAAR office. The contact information is on page 4, or visit the Prime Times pages of our Web site at www.coastal.edu/csaar.)

To briefly review, Part I of this series noted that for most of the history of humankind, it was assumed that old age brought with it a gradual, inevitable and irreversible decline in cognitive abilities after age 60 called senescence. (Cognitive abilities – formerly called “mental abilities” – are those brain functions that allow us to think, learn, remember, process information, make decisions and solve problems.) Recent research on cognitive abilities in older adults, however, has shown that with the proper precautions and activity regimens, the effects of senescence can be at least partially reversed and even prevented. We call such activities “Ten Keys to Smart Aging,” and the underlying pervasive point on how we can maintain and even enhance our intellect is “use it or lose it”! We must seek out and take advantage of all opportunities to exercise our brains just like we must exercise our muscles to keep them from weakening or even atrophying.

Each of the Ten Keys is summarized in a general principle and then detailed in specific recommendations for everyday smart aging activities. Principle 1 was to maintain an engaged and active lifestyle in one’s community. We shouldn’t cut the connections to our careers when we retire, but rather should seek new and different ways to use the skills and knowledge during our later years that we’ve acquired during our previous productive experiences. Examples of how this can be attained include continuing to work full- or part-time in our career occupations, consulting in areas where we have expertise, finding hobbies or pastimes that use the same kinds of cognitive abilities, volunteering for organizations where our expertise can be applied, or taking up new challenges that require intellectual concentration and exertion, such as the performing and/or visual arts. Several Grand Strand organizations that offer volunteering and arts training experiences were listed for our readers in Part I of the Fall issue.

The second issue of Prime Times carried Part II of the series, which included the second and third principles of smart aging. Principle 2 was to keep both the quantity and quality of daily activities high. Inactivity – whether due to lack of motivation, lack of opportunities, or poor health – breeds senescence. Spending most of our time just watching TV and eating is bad for us, both physically and intellectually. Experts suggest that 1/4 to 1/2 of our daily waking time (4 to 8 hours) should be spent in activities which are productive and/or enjoyable. Examples of high quality activities are watching television programs that produce new and more sophisticated learning experiences, reading a good newspaper daily or books with high quality writing and complicated plot twists, playing complex games like chess or bridge, and using computers and the Internet to explore new interests and activity options.

Principle 3 was to socialize often with new people. While interacting with one’s family or friends is healthy, it is also important to meet and get to know strangers who present us with new attitudes and values, and new interests and activities. Socializing with new people encourages “cross-fertilization” of ideas and activities, which is very beneficial to us intellectually. While just interacting with well known friends and family members over a long period of time is easier and more comfortable, it can quickly lead to “interpersonal stagnation,” which is detrimental to our cognitive development. It is especially beneficial to interact with new people who are smarter and more active than we are, which can promote the best kinds of learning experiences for our brains. Senior Centers, community centers, and Lifelong Learning societies are good places to meet new people.

Now to the next two principle Keys to Smart Aging. Principle 4 is to seek out educational and training experiences. There is no better way to exercise your brain, enhance your intellectual development, and avoid cognitive senescence than to have to focus all of your intellectual skills on a formal learning task. Formal learning is best exemplified by college level courses (assuming you have had at least some college courses in the past) where you’re required to read textbook-level content with understanding, retain the most important concepts and principles for classroom discussion, and organize your new learning and apply it appropriately to tests or course projects.

Since it may have been some 40 or 50 or more years since most older adults have taken a college-level course, this task can be very challenging and even discouraging at first. Reading and study skills may be rusty and come back slowly, competing with traditional-age students can be daunting, and having one’s work critically evaluated and graded can be bad for one’s ego. But despite these challenges, there is simply no other activity that can be of greater benefit for sharpening one’s cognitive skills and knowledge.

An alternative that older adults can use to ease their transition back to becoming a student is to audit a college course or two. Auditing means taking a course for no credit, with class assignments and tests optional. Auditing is no substitute for the full benefits of taking courses for credit, but it still represents a major step forward in intellectual stimulation compared to most older adults’ alternative activities.

At this point we should highlight a possible motivational factor for older adults and retirees taking advantage of higher education learning opportunities. In South Carolina, all residents aged 60 or above can take one or more courses from public colleges or universities for free! This means that Grand Strand senior citizens can complete a special application form and take any undergraduate or graduate-level course for which they’re qualified at Coastal Carolina University – or Horry-Georgetown Technical College – at absolutely no cost, except for textbooks and other required course materials (e.g., books of readings, lab fees, etc.). Presently fewer than 100 older adults are taking advantage of this golden opportunity at CCU, but we hope readers of this newsletter will change that statistic markedly upward in the near future. (Prime Times #2 included a sample list of courses continued on page 7
Each issue of Prime Times will feature an outstanding local agency, business or organization serving older adults and retirees on the Grand Strand to illustrate the range of services available in the area. If you would like to nominate a facility for this feature – or if you are in an organization that would like to be featured – we want to hear from you!

In December 2002, The Lakes at Litchfield retirement community proudly introduced the last phase of its full continuum of care. The skilled nursing and rehabilitation unit, known as Alexander Place, began offering nursing and rehabilitation services to qualified individuals. Genesis Rehabilitation partnered with our community to provide Speech, Occupational and Physical Therapy. Today, with a full house and a successful track record, the retirement campus continues to play an integral part in providing superior healthcare to Lowcountry residents.

Alexander Place is expertly led by Dr. Lynn Brook, medical director, and Shannon Greene, director of nursing. The capable, friendly staff attends to the healthcare needs while promoting wellness and re-entry into community life. Medicare-certified, Alexander Place is allowing residents of the retirement campus, as well as those living outside the complex, to receive health care services in an elegant, private setting that is second to none. The Lakes at Litchfield is home to approximately 200 residents who enjoy experiencing a catered lifestyle, whether they live in one of the spacious independent living homes and apartments or in the healthcare area, comprised of assisted living, memory care and long-term care.

Our residents enjoy a long list of amenities included in one easy monthly payment. Included are all exterior and interior maintenance, weekly housekeeping, annual spring cleaning, 30 meals per month, all utilities (except telephone), cablevision, social programs, insurance on home, city/county taxes, transportation, 24-hour emergency call system, wellness program with state-of-the-art fitness room, library, card room, and arts and crafts room. Other amenities located on site at additional costs are a beauty salon, rehabilitation services, physician house calls, medical screenings, private dining with catered services, dry cleaning services, massage services, grocery delivery, companion/sitter services and handyman services.

See what our happy residents have to say about life at The Lakes at Litchfield.

“The decision to live at The Lakes at Litchfield was an easy one. The mild climate, the variety of entertainment and relaxed lifestyle are things we were looking for. The residents are like one big family – friendly and always ready to look out for each other. The staff is like a part of this family. Their main objective is to care for the needs of the residents. All phases of living are provided for, whether independent, assisted or skilled care. Our family knows we are active and happy here, therefore they have peace of mind. We wouldn’t want to live anywhere else! We are glad we made the move while we are young enough to enjoy all the good years and amenities provided.”

David and Harriet Moore - Clifton Forge, Virginia

“After considerable research, we liked the location of The Lakes at Litchfield and chose to build a house here. Among the amenities promised was upkeep of our house and yard. We enjoy the privacy of being in our own home without the usual responsibilities. Two other vital factors are the dining which provides attractive foods as well as those needed for special diets and the safety net factor for the step down health care should severe problems arise.”

Dr. and Mrs. Joseph M. Oppenheim - Lima, Ohio

Proud to be a part of excellence, The Lakes at Litchfield invites the public to tour our beautiful campus and see why it has become the location of choice for seniors. If you’ve been waiting all your life for the retirement of your dreams, The Lakes at Litchfield is where you belong. Our knowledgeable Marketing staff will schedule a personal appointment to discuss your individual needs and help you select the home that is just right for you. For further information, you can check out our website at www.lakes-litchfield.com, call (843) 235-0113 or write us at The Lakes at Litchfield, 120 Lakes At Litchfield Dr., Pawleys Island, SC 29585.

CSAAR Contact Info

The publishers and editors of Prime Times want to hear from you. Whether it’s a letter to the editor, a question for your Friendly Neighborhood Gerontologist, or just a note to say you like – or don’t like – one or more aspects of this newsletter (e.g., this issue dropped the “CCU Events Calendar” and added the “Now and Then” feature), we encourage interested readers to contact us before the next Prime Times goes to press. By snail mail, write to Prime Times, CSAAR Office, 35 Canal Building, CCU, P.O. Box 261954, Conway, SC 29528; e-mail us at rjohnso1@coastal.edu or rockdot@coastal.edu; telephone us at (843) 349-4115 or 349-4116; or send us a fax at (843) 349-4122.
As more and more older adults become computer literate and travel the information superhighway, we should be reminded that some potentially huge potholes are waiting just around the bend. Relentless, systematic reporting and subsequent transmission of breaking news stories, current events and topics that stir insatiable human interest are flooding the airways and cyberspace, giving us a glut of information...and sometimes misinformation. Imagine the following scenario.

Simply surfing the Internet to search the best airline rates can lead the surfer to seek hotel rates or rental cars, and before you realize what has happened, you find yourself at a Web site promoting ways to repair your credit or eliminate your mortgage. Eliminate my mortgage! Now they have my attention! But wait, there is more.

For an advance fee of $3,000 some yo-yo in California promises to legally, ethically and morally eliminate my mortgage. But wait, there is more. After I send him my $3,000, I also have to deed my property over to him. Well, after all, he did just eliminate my mortgage, didn't he? Deeding the property over to him allows him to put it in a family trust with me as the beneficiary. But wait, there is more. Although I am the beneficiary, he still has the property in his name and is the rightful owner...that is, if he actually paid off my mortgage company...which he didn't because he filed fraudulent documents with the county Register of Deeds office. Hey, don't blame the poor souls down at the courthouse; the documents were signed and notarized. Sure they were forged, but that won't stop the yo-yo from applying for a new mortgage and splitting the income from that little deal with me. Easy money...or is it?

Let's think about this. We could keep doing this “legally, ethically and morally” until someone from the Better Business Bureau or a law enforcement agency comes along and starts to question what kind of operation is going on here. When a call to my mortgage company finds that I am now in default and they are about to foreclose on my home, I call the yo-yo in California. What do you mean the phone has been disconnected? I'll set the record straight. I'll call the “local rep” who got me involved when I ended up on his Web site looking for a hotel or car or whatever. They can't do this to me, can they? What do you mean this guy was convicted of Securities Fraud back in 1991 and is currently under investigation by law enforcement agencies nationwide? Why didn't someone tell me I was dealing with a crook?

This kind of scenario is actually happening nearly every day as 500 plus homeowners in 23 states are painfully discovering. Don't feel too sorry for them because they knew deep down inside exactly what they were doing; cheating the system or trying to cheat the system! Some will claim ignorance of the law as their excuse while others choose to denounce the United States banking system as the real villain, all the while screaming their innocence and proclaiming to be victims themselves.

The real victims are you and I, who ultimately pay higher mortgage rates because these greedy, get-rich-quick wannabes forced millions of dollars in foreclosed mortgages to be paid for by U.S. Government insured agencies. Unfortunately and customarily, the wheels of justice turn ever so slowly and the perpetrators of this scheme and others like it are either yet to be prosecuted or still running the “con” as you absorb this message.

(The last laugh will be mine though. As I slide ever so comfortably into my retirement years, I can clearly visualize sitting at my trusty computer screen several years from now knowing that the scamming yo-yo in California is undoubtedly trying to con his cellmate out of a pack of cigarettes!)

How Grand Strand Older Adults Spend Their Time . . . . Continued from page 2

When it comes to the question of what activities local seniors would like to participate in more but presently do not, we were gratified to find that educational and informational activities were number one at 14.4 percent. (If those respondents would contact the CSAAR, we can tell them about attractive educational and informational opportunities that are available right now!)

- 12 percent reported wanting to participate more in sports, especially golf, tennis and bowling
- 7.9 percent want to travel more
- 5 percent want to do more volunteering (another activity the CSAAR is working on to help coordinate)
- 4.8 percent want to do more arts and crafts
- 4.4 percent want more recreational and entertainment activities
- 3.9 percent want more musical experiences
- 3.5 percent reported wanting to do more fishing and use computers more than they do now

In our last question, seven barriers or obstacles to participating in wanted activities were identified by our respondents. The biggest problem was the cost of wanted activities, at 18.6 percent, with the distance one has to travel to access activities close behind at 17.6 percent. Third was the health or age of the respondents at 12.5 percent; i.e., not feeling well enough or feeling too old to participate in wanted activities. (We at the CSAAR, of course, would argue that you're never too old to do something you really want to do!) Another 11.8 percent of respondents said they were simply too busy to do everything they'd like to, and 6.6 percent admitted that they had the time but were just not motivated enough to get out and join in activities they were interested in. Some 5.2 percent said they needed more information or scheduling details to know what activities were available in our area, and 4.5 percent said they needed help with transportation.

In closing, the CSAAR staff would like Prime Times readers to know that the Center and University are both working on programs and events designed with older adults and retirees in mind, and are providing as many of these as possible for free or at reduced costs. We are also scheduling more activities at the University's satellite centers throughout the Grand Strand, so seniors from Georgetown to North Myrtle Beach do not have to drive to Conway to participate in CCU-sponsored activities.
Ask Your Friendly Neighborhood Gerontologist

Q: What is “ageism” and how can it be combated?
A: Ageism is stereotyping, prejudice and/or discrimination against a person based solely or primarily on age. While ageism technically could refer to either positive or negative biases, and could apply to people of any age group, we’ll focus on negative attitudes toward older adults in this article. More specifically, we’re talking about the perceptions by younger people that older adults are frail, feeble, sickly, lonely, sad, opinionated, obstinate, etc.

First let’s clarify a few key terms. Stereotyping is over-generalizing the characteristics of a few individuals to a whole group. By definition, stereotypes may have a kernel of truth to them, but since large groups of people are so diverse, all stereotypes are basically false. Older adults are no exception. We classify all people aged 60 or older as “older adults,” and they represent such a widely diverse group that there are few if any characteristics that accurately apply to all people of that age.

Prejudice literally means “to pre-judge”; i.e., it’s knowing that a particular person belongs to a particular group, and assuming that person has all the characteristics we attribute to that group. (See how prejudice is the “flip side” of stereotyping, and how stereotyping almost inevitably leads to prejudicial thinking?) Also like stereotyping, since they are based on false premises, most prejudicial attitudes are not true.

Discrimination is the behavioral expression of prejudice and stereotyping; i.e. it’s treating someone differently because of perceived group membership or characteristics. By taking covert, cognitive phenomena like stereotyping and prejudice to the overt level, people with such biases perform acts which are at least immoral, if not outright illegal.

Reversing ageism requires a three-pronged strategy. Since ageism is a relatively widespread phenomenon, changing millions of minds about their biased attitudes toward older adults will likely occur gradually over a long period of time. Critical components of such change are the mass media. The more often older adults are portrayed stereotypically – especially as the targets of jokes or satire – the more such biased attitudes are fed and fostered. The more frequently older adults are portrayed as upstanding, healthy, social, happy, knowledgeable and functionally active people, the more difficult such negative attitudes are to maintain. Positive images such as those portrayed by Sean Connery and Katharine Hepburn and Barbara Walters and Mike Wallace are powerful counterattacks on ageism; the Golden Girls are a mixed bag, and too many grandparent and great-grandparent characters on TV and in the movies are negative. (This is despite the fact that the average age for becoming a grandparent in the U.S. is now down to 43!)

A second related approach to combating ageism is to be found in positive role models. The more older adults show up as leaders, decision-makers, and problem-solvers in government, business and industry, and even our local communities, the better. As an “individualist” culture, America routinely regards its senior citizens less positively and with less respect than other “collectivist” cultures around the world, where “elders” are the most revered members of the family or tribe. But publicizing older adults as strong leaders, wise decision-makers, and creative problem-solvers goes a long way toward making negative attitudes toward seniors much less palatable.

Finally, there are important roles we as individual older adults can play in combating ageism; if we allow ourselves to become inactive, socially disengaged and unproductive; if we are constantly complaining about minutiae among our family, friends and neighbors; if we write incoherent letters to the editor in the newspaper, are monkey wrenches in the machinery of our homeowners association, or insist on driving ten miles per hour below the speed limit in the passing lane on the highway, then we have no one but ourselves to blame for encouraging the kinds of negative attitudes toward older adults we call ageism.

There is no greater obstacle to ageism than a smart, active, wise, good humored and socially constructive older adult. And regardless of our individual strengths and weaknesses, most of us have the capacity to be exactly that...especially in public. So fight negative attitudes one person at a time by acting in ways that are incompatible with negative stereotypes as often as possible, and we’ll start turning the tide on ageism!

Prime Times recognizes that there’s always room for a smile – occasionally even a laugh out loud – among the serious topics we address. If you have a humorous story about the lighter side of aging, send it in and we may publish it in future issues of the newsletter.

A couple in their 90s were having more and more problems remembering things, so they decided to go to their doctor for a checkup. The doctor told them they were physically okay, and suggested they start writing things down to help them remember.

Later that night, while watching TV, the old man gets up from his chair.

His wife asks, “Where are you going?”

“To the kitchen,” he replies.

She asks, “Will you get me a bowl of ice cream?”

The husband says, “Sure.”

He then grumbles his way into the kitchen.

About 20 minutes later, the old man returns from the kitchen and hands his wife a plate of bacon and eggs.

“I told you that you should have written it down!,” she scolds him. “Where’s my toast?”

She gently reminds him, “Don’t you think you should write it down so you’ll remember what to get me?”

“No,” he says. “I can remember a simple thing like that!”

Then she says, “I’d like some strawberries on top, too. You better write it down so you won’t forget.”

“I can remember that,” he answers. “You want a bowl of ice cream with strawberries.”

She adds, “I’d also like whipped cream on the strawberries. Now I’m certain you’ll forget all that, so you’d better write it down!”

Clearly irritated, he replies, “I don’t need to write it down! I can remember ice cream with strawberries and whipped cream on top.”

He then grumbles his way into the kitchen.
open to older adults in the spring semester, and we plan to do so again before the first summer session of 2005.) Readers interested in auditing or taking a course for credit should begin the application process by calling CCU Admissions at 349-2170.

Less formal learning and training experiences sponsored by Coastal Carolina that can be of great benefit to older adults’ cognitive development are also available at various times of the year. These are the “non credit” or continuing education “short courses” offered through the University’s Academic Outreach Program, which offers an extremely wide range of learning experiences that are provided at four sites across the Grand Strand. These short courses may range from a single meeting to several weeks, are based on the expressed interests of older adults and retirees, and are offered at CCU Higher Education Centers in Conway, Myrtle Beach, Litchfield/Pawleys Island and Georgetown. (See the article in Prime Times #2 on the CCU Lifelong Learning Society for more details about short courses, call 349-2665 or e-mail LLS President Norm Whiteley at whiteley@coastal.edu.)

Principle 5 is to maintain and increase your competencies. One of the key variables that determine successful and enjoyable aging is maintaining and improving one’s sense of “self-efficacy”; i.e., the number and difficulty of tasks one is competent to perform. The more competencies one possesses – the quantity and quality of knowledge and skills one has learned – the more one feels useful, the more purposeful one’s life feels, and the more independent one can remain despite old age. Usefulness, purposefulness and independence are keys to one’s perceived quality of life, and how long one can maintain that high quality of life as one ages.

But competencies are of little use unless one applies them meaningfully. As important as being competent is using those competencies to benefit oneself and others. The more you can help yourself and others, the better. Applying one’s competencies meaningfully not only brings pride in one’s accomplishments, but also great satisfaction that one has significantly contributed to the welfare of others.

Thankfully, it’s hard to imagine reaching your 60s or 70s and beyond without mastering at least some competencies that are useful to family, friends and community. Whether such competencies were acquired during one’s career, or during one’s life as a family relations manager and homemaker, or are new competencies that have been acquired by training and education experiences as an older adult, there should be many meaningful outlets for applying those competencies on a regular basis.

Good options for applying such knowledge and skills are to be found in part- or full-time employment, some of the more meaningful and productive hobbies, volunteering for social service agencies or charities, or even teaching “short courses” through a local university’s continuing education program or Lifelong Learning Society. And the benefits of applying one’s competencies to socially meaningful needs can be multiplied by bringing friends or family members along for the ride. Team volunteering or team teaching brings several of our Smart Aging principles into play, and can make the whole experience both more productive and more enjoyable for all involved.

To summarize, smart aging requires continuing one’s “education,” whether formally or informally. No activity exercises the brain more broadly or deeply, and contributes more to beneficial cognitive development. And whether one’s competencies are recently learned by education or training obtained during old age, or whether one brings such competencies forward from their careers or lifelong learning experiences, applying one’s knowledge and skills meaningfully to meet significant needs of one’s family, friends or community can reap the dual benefits of enhanced self-efficacy (pride in one’s good work) and self-satisfaction (the knowledge that you’ve helped others). Well educated and competent older adults enjoy a much higher quality of life than those who do not follow these principles of smart aging!

Increasing Wellness during Middle-Age Adulthood

a day, respectively. Foods that are rich in fiber include whole wheat or whole grain products, beans, nuts, seeds, fruits and vegetables.

► B-6 AND B-12 Absorption of vitamins B-6 and B-12 can be a problem in this age group due to lower levels of stomach acid and decreased absorption from the GI tract. Increasing intake of B-6 and B-12 rich foods is important for these reasons and also to keep the immune system functioning properly. Eating a fortified breakfast cereal in the morning can help intake levels. Meat, poultry and fish are good sources of B-12. B-6 can be found in sweet potatoes, chicken, baked potatoes and bananas. Taking a daily multivitamin is another way to insure adequate intake of these vitamins.

► FLUID Men and women in this age group are encouraged to drink at least eight, eight-ounce cups of fluid a day. This is due to a reduced sense of thirst that can lead to drinking less fluid and possible dehydration. Although juice and other beverages can be a part of these eight cups, water is always an excellent choice.

► MAINTAINING A HEALTHY WEIGHT According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), obesity rates have increased by more than 60 percent among adults. Although overweight and obesity may be protective against osteoporosis, it increases the risk of heart disease, some cancers and Type 2 diabetes. Recently the CDC estimated that the lifetime medical costs of hypertension, diabetes, stroke and high cholesterol among moderately obese people are $10,000 more than among adults at a healthy weight. That is a financial incentive to keep your weight at a healthy level in middle-age adulthood. Choose to eat right and increase physical activity to avoid weight gain during these years.

► FAT Although there is no Dietary Reference Intake for total fat in middle-age adulthood, to reduce the risk of heart disease, some cancers and other major causes of death, it is recommended that fat calories be in the 20 to 35 percent of total calorie range, with less than 10 percent of calories from saturated fat. Choose canola as your main oil, substituting olive, sesame, peanut and safflower oils for different flavors.

► PROTEIN The protein needs of adults in the 51 to 70 age range are about the same or slightly greater than younger adults. Because energy needs are often lower, it is important to select high quality proteins like lean meat, fish, eggs, poultry, low-fat milk, nuts, seeds, grains, beans, peas and lentils.

► CARBOHYDRATES If intake of carbohydrates is very low, dietary protein may be used as an energy source rather than for other necessary body functions such as tissue building and repair; therefore, adequate carbohydrates should be consumed each day to provide energy for the body’s work. Wise carbohydrate choices include complex carbohydrates such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains, which are all rich in fiber as well as other vitamins and minerals.

The idea that good nutrition can influence the aging process is appealing because it means that your actions can slow the process within the natural limits set by heredity. Although aging is a natural process, healthy eating and regular physical activity can contribute to a long, healthy life. Taking time now to honor your body through good nutritional choices will lead to future healthy rewards.
Now & Then

NOTE: This is the first in a new series of short features for Prime Times. It focuses on common everyday activities of life as they occur today, around a hundred years ago at the turn of the 20th century, and 500 years ago in the Middle Ages. We hope that these comparisons will help readers reflect on the many modern day conveniences and technologies that we perhaps take for granted, and thus enable us to be more appreciative and feel better about our lives today here at the start of the 21st century.

Taking a Bath

~TODAY: People can take baths or showers in their porcelain, fiberglass, or plastic tubs as often as they like for as long as they like. The water – provided by the city at low cost – is pure enough for drinking. Many tubs have shower heads that offer fine or coarse spray and massage pulses, and most bathrooms that need them have hand rails and other aids for the aged or infirm. Still we complain if the hot water doesn't come on as quickly as we'd like, or last as long as we'd like, and we look down our noses at others whose bathroom decor doesn't suit our taste or whose towels aren't fluffy enough.

~1900: Only the most affluent homes had centrally heated water for bathing or cooking. The vast majority had to heat well water from a pump on a gas, coal or wood-fired stove for a bath, transport the hot water to wherever the tub was by hand, then jump in and wash quickly before the water turned cold. Other bathers repeated the same process. Towels were thin cloth and often not clean, bathtubs had “feet” on them, and while the bathroom might be found within the house, the toilet usually was outside: the “outhouse.”

~1500: Bathtubs were little more than large cauldrons. Water that was often polluted by sewerage or bacteria was transported from the nearest creek, river or lake by hand and cooked in a fireplace, then carried to the tub until a functional water level was attained. The whole family bathed from the same tub with the same water. Father came first – the only one who enjoyed fairly clean and warm water – followed in turn by the other male family members based on age. The women, girls and babies came last, and by then the water was so dirty you couldn't see through it and could lose track of something small within; thus the old saying, “Don’t throw the baby out with the bath water!”

After these not-so-nostalgic looks back, today’s world and problems don’t seem quite so bad, now do they?