

# THE MESSENGER

From RIVERBEND SENIOR LIVING and WILLOW RIDGE HEALTHCARE



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## Some Ways to Improve Health Are Easy and Enjoyable

We all know the “usual” ways of getting or retaining good health – eat the right foods, exercise, don’t smoke, and if you drink, do so in moderation. One of the advantages of living in a skilled nursing facility is that some of these things – such as eating nutritiously – are done for you automatically. Most nursing facilities have registered dietitians on staff, whose job it is to make sure residents are eating well. And nursing homes also have daily activities that usually include exercise or movement classes. But you still need some motivation to stick to a healthy regimen. Exercise classes aren’t mandatory and if you have a chronic condition such as arthritis, exercise may be painful. Friends and family may bring you cakes and cookies to munch on between meals. Let’s face it – staying healthy can be hard work!

But here are 10 ways you can improve your health, while still having some fun – or, at least without expending too much effort.

### Connect with others

As human beings, we are, by nature, social. As we age, socialization continues to be critically important to our overall well-being. Several studies have shown that people who are more social get sick less and have healthier minds. A study from the Rush University Memory and Aging Project concluded that a higher level of social engagement in old age is associated with better cognitive function.

### Fall in love

Being in love has been linked to a lower risk for



cardiovascular disease, a healthier immune system, quicker recovery times, lower stress and longer life.

### Give thanks

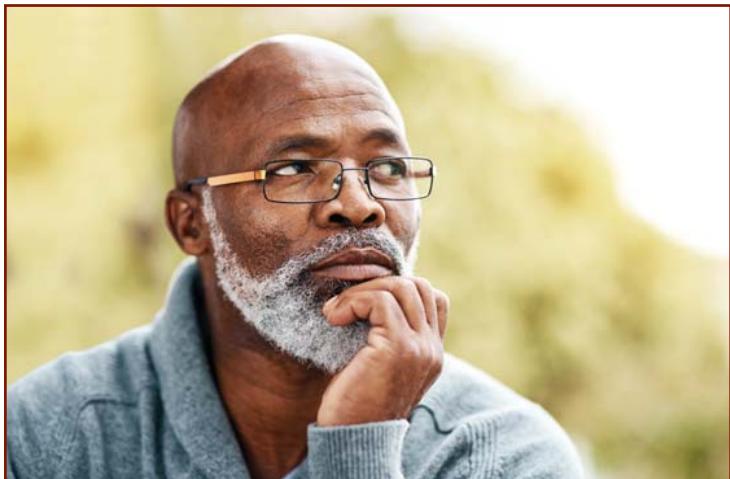
A study conducted by Robert Emmons, University of California, Davis, and Michael McCullough, University of Miami, discovered that people who practiced gratitude regularly were more optimistic, which led to an increased sense of well-being. By practicing the simple act of becoming aware of what we have to be thankful for, we can drastically improve the quality of our life.

### Meditate

Spending a few moments each day in silence and focusing on your breath can reduce stress, enhance rehabilitation, and improve brain health.

*Continued on page 3*

# What We Don't Know About Healthy Aging Might Hurt Us



How much do Americans know about their own health and safety? During the past year or so, researchers have conducted a number of surveys to find out. The results show that many of us have a way to go when it comes to being up to speed on our own risk factors and lifestyle choices! Here are six questions where most of us got a failing mark:

**1. What's a healthy weight for me?** A Gallup poll showed that the rate of obesity in the U.S. is higher than it's ever been—and yet, fewer people describe themselves as "overweight." Being overweight raises our risk of heart disease, arthritis, cancer, disability and even dementia. Talk to your doctor about a healthy weight goal, and how to get there.

**2. What's my blood sugar level?** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently noted that one-third of Americans have elevated blood sugar that could progress to diabetes. Yet only 10 percent of these people were aware that they had this condition, called prediabetes. Ask your healthcare provider to test your blood sugar, and follow their instructions on how to keep it at a safe level.

**3. Am I getting enough exercise?** Exercise lowers the risk of just about every health problem. That's why

doctors ask patients about it. But recent studies show people often overestimate the amount of exercise they get, describing themselves, for example, as "moderately active," when in reality (as revealed by fitness tracking devices) they are spending most of the day sitting around. Talk to your doctor about an exercise program that's right for you.

**4. Is my car safe for me to drive?** Many seniors—and their families—are concerned about whether it's safe for them to be behind the wheel. Seniors might take a driver safety class, but what about their cars? In 2017, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety noted that only 10 percent of older drivers equip their vehicles with inexpensive safety adaptations that could prevent a crash, such as pedal extensions, improved mirrors and steering wheel covers.

**5. Is it safe to drive and take my medications?** Many of the prescription drugs seniors take to control pain, treat depression or help them sleep can cause drowsiness, dizziness and confusion. A 2017 survey from West Virginia University showed that many people who take these drugs are unaware that these side effects could make it unsafe to operate a vehicle. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about the risks.

**6. Am I drinking too much?** As reported in the previous issue of this publication, experts usually recommend that men drink no more than 14 alcoholic drinks per week, and women no more than 7. But an April 2018 study published in *The Lancet* suggests that even that much can raise the risk of stroke, heart failure and other health conditions. Talk to your doctor about your drinking, and ask for help if you're having trouble cutting down to a safe amount.

*Source: Real Properties in association with IlluminAge Communication Partners; copyright 2017 IlluminAge.*

See us online at [www.rphmessenger.com](http://www.rphmessenger.com) for these additional articles: "May 13 – 19, 2018 Is National Women's Health Week" • "A Five-Point Checklist for Navigating Your Neighborhood" • "Puzzle: Focus on Senior Women's Health"

## **Improve Health, continued from page 1**

### **Brush your teeth with a dry toothbrush before adding toothpaste**

Oral hygiene is an essential part of aging well. Numerous studies have shown a link between gum disease and heart disease. A study published in the Journal of the American Dental Association found that patients who brushed their teeth with a dry toothbrush before adding toothpaste, saw a 63 percent reduction in plaque and a 55 percent reduction in bleeding.

### **Take a nap**

Studies have shown that sleep – even in the form of a quick nap – helps us do everything from maintaining a healthy weight to improving our memory to spurring our creativity. It may even help us live longer.

### **Laugh**

It may turn out that laughter really is the best medicine. According to the Mayo Clinic, laughter reduces stress, strengthens the immune system and improves your mood. It's also good for the heart and the brain.

### **Go outside**

It's a big, beautiful world out there, just waiting for you to appreciate it. Going outside has all sorts of benefits. It makes exercise feel easier, so you'll be inclined to do more. It can increase creativity, reduce stress and pain, and help you sleep better.

### **Add some plants to your room**

Plants help purify indoor air. Spider plants, which are one of the easiest houseplants to grow, reduce formaldehyde. Dracaena comes in 40 different varieties and removes benzene and xylene. As a bonus, plants add beauty to almost any space.

### **Drink more water**

You've heard it a million times – that's because it's that important. Proper hydration is essential to maintain every system in your body. Fluids carry nutrients to your cells, help eliminate waste, and keep you looking younger. If you want a little variety, add some fruit juice to your water.

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# **Aging & Caregiving in the News**

**Information, updates and interesting tidbits from across the country and around the world.**

#### **In this issue:**

- The benefits of ballet for older adults
- May Is Older Americans Month 2018

#### **Online:**

- Learn a second language and protect your brain

### **Put on Your Leotard and Lace Up Your Toe Shoes!**



*Queensland Ballet's Artistic Director Li Cunxin leads a Ballet for Seniors class. (Photo courtesy of Ali Cameron, Queensland University of Technology)*

Maybe you work out at the gym, or take an exercise class or tai chi ... but it's not really your cup of tea. What about ballet? If you dreamed of performing in "Swan Lake" or "The Nutcracker" when you were a kid, it's good to know that ballet has been found to be an excellent form of exercise for older adults! Queensland University of Technology in Australia recently partnered with the Queensland Ballet to create a ballet program for seniors, and they found that not only did the participants experience higher energy levels and

*Continued on page 4*

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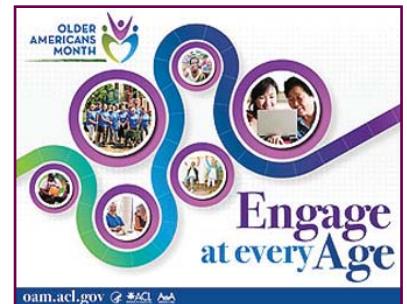
### In The News, *continued from page 3*

greater flexibility; they also reported an enhanced sense of self-esteem and social connection. Said study author Prof. Gene Moyle, “Some of the participants reported that they found the classes positively euphoric, and transformational in the pleasure they felt at being part of such weekly social engagement.” Many senior centers, senior living communities and other organizations are offering ballet classes these days—so go ahead, embrace your inner Rudolph Nureyev!

### “Engage at Every Age”—May Is Older Americans Month 2018

Since 1963, Older Americans Month has been a time to celebrate older Americans, their stories, and their contributions. Led by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), the annual observance offers a special opportunity to learn about, support, and recognize our nation’s older citizens. This year’s theme, “Engage at Every Age,” is meant to encourage

older adults to remain active and involved in the community. It is also a call for our communities to promote services that support independence for seniors, wherever they call home; to involve older adults in planning and community events; and to provide opportunities for seniors to work, volunteer, lead and mentor. Says the ACL, “You are never too old (or too young) to participate in activities that can enrich your physical, mental, and emotional well-being.”



*Source: Real Properties in association with IlluminAge Communication Partners; copyright 2017 IlluminAge. (Older Americans Month image courtesy of the U.S. Administration on Aging)*