

## **Aging Well for a Better Tomorrow**

May is designated as Older Americans Month. This is a great time to bring attention to the issues that affect older adults and create community-wide opportunities to help older Americans improve their quality of life. We, as a nation, must work together to give older adults the tools they need to make healthy decisions.

By 2030, one in every five Americans will be age 65 or older. Although the risk of disease increases with advancing age, poor health is not an inevitable consequence of aging. Many illnesses, disabilities and even death associated with chronic disease are preventable.

Nearly 40% of deaths in America can be attributed to poor health habits such as lack of physical exercise, poor eating habits and smoking. Older Americans can prevent or control chronic disease by adopting healthy habits such as exercising regularly, maintaining a healthy diet and ceasing tobacco use.

The benefits of regular physical activity include weight control; healthy bones, muscles and joints; arthritis relief; reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression; and more. Exercise does not have to be strenuous and is safe for people of all age groups. In fact, it's healthier to exercise than eliminate it altogether. Older Americans can greatly benefit from a regular exercise routine that includes strength, balance, stretching, and endurance exercises.

In addition to a regular exercise, good nutrition is vital in maintaining good health. Improving older Americans' diets can reduce the occurrence of chronic diseases, but older adults over age 65 do not maintain a healthy diet. Reducing saturated fats and eating a balanced diet of fruits, vegetables, and grains can help out older Americans on the right track to staying healthy.

Tobacco use increases the risk of heart disease and cancer and is the single most preventable cause of death in the United States. Older adults who stop smoking will gain immediate and long-term health benefits.

While it's important for older Americans to have good physical health, it's equally important that they maintain good mental health. Twenty percent of all older Americans experience depression and anxiety disorders.

Studies have shown that engaging in social activities within the community can greatly improve mental health. In fact, research has demonstrated a strong relationship between volunteering and mental health and that volunteering provides older adults with greater benefits than younger volunteers. Benefits include improved mental and physical health, greater life satisfaction, lower rates of depression and lower mortality rates.

The U.S. Administration on Aging and its National Aging Services Network support a number of successful programs throughout the country that are helping older adults live better today and in the future. These programs keep people independent and out of nursing homes through streamlined access to health and long term care information and options and provide home and community-based systems of services that include the support for family caregivers. These programs also encourage older people to remain active and make behavioral changes through the increased use of evidence-based disease prevention programs under the Older Americans Act as well as the use of preventive benefits available under Medicare.

You can contact the Parker County Area Agency on Aging, located at the Weatherford Senior Citizens Center to participate and volunteer for activities that promote and serve older adults including Meals on Wheels, providing transportation and more. Additionally, you can search out ways you can involve your community's older adults in volunteer efforts, allowing them to share their wisdom and energy. By working together, we can improve the health and wellbeing of our Nation's older adults and pave the way for better health as we age.

Source: US Administration on Aging