

Build the momentum

for Active Aging Week



Active Aging Week

Theme: Many journeys, many destinations
September 23–29, 2012
www.icaa.cc/aaw.htm

Set the stage for participants to begin—and continue—a behavioral change journey

Within the fun and social atmosphere, the core purpose of Active Aging Week® is educating older adults on how they can adopt and maintain positive health behaviors. Promoted by the International Council on Active Aging® (ICAA) and organized by you and your colleagues, Active Aging Week events often feature health education; physical, social, intellectual and spiritual activities; volunteering; intergenerational meetings and community outreach. All events offered during this annual health promotion

observance stay true to three core elements: They are fun, educational, and free or low cost to participants.

For active-aging professionals and older adults alike, Active Aging Week is an opportunity to begin fall on a positive note. The weeklong event, held September 23–29, 2012, celebrates healthy, active aging and spreads the message that people can engage in life fully at any age.

Within this year's theme of "Many journeys, many destinations," there are several key messages:

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- Choose a healthy lifestyle for better years of life.
- Spend 30 minutes each day in physical activity.
- Discover one new activity that brings you value.

The theme and messages provide an excellent stage for health behavior change—for the better! As you move through summer and plan the program for Active Aging Week, take some time to think not only of how to promote participation, but also of ways to help people integrate positive health behaviors into their lives afterwards.

Remember the Stages of Change

You are likely familiar with the Trans-theoretical Model, commonly known as the Stages of Change.^{1,2} During Active Aging Week, you will see people who are each somewhere along the continuum of change shown in the following stages.

Precontemplation (they do not realize there is a problem or issue). Perhaps people have a chronic health condition, like osteoarthritis, but don't realize that physical activity will make them feel better. Or, they feel lonely, but don't realize that in the long-term, that could impact their emotional health.

Contemplation (they are thinking about making changes). Individuals may realize that physical activity or healthy eating would help manage a health condition, but they aren't quite ready to give up batter-fried foods. Or, they've always been interested in theater and music,

but are shy about joining an amateur performance group, which would provide intellectual, social and emotional stimulation.

Preparation (they want to take action, but perhaps haven't succeeded in the past). It's hard to change the habits of a lifetime and start walking more, or eating more vegetables or taking a class on computers. People may not know what to do, or give up after one try.

Action (modifying behaviors to overcome a problem or a challenge). They joined the walking group or book club, but need motivation to keep going.

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Maintenance (people take positive action, and need to continue to do so). These people are probably your “regulars” who have made time for healthy living activities. This group may need motivation to maintain the wellness lifestyle in the form of challenges, mentoring, group participation, periodic outcomes measurements or some other method.

Build momentum

Take a cue from social marketing to appeal to individuals in the early stages of change. Social marketing borrows techniques from commercial marketing to promote behavior change. Here are a few points to keep in mind.³

Emphasize that the people you invite don't need to expend a lot of effort to get big rewards. Most people simply have to attend, and the cost is minimal or nonexistent. The rewards might be tangible, such as a T-shirt or goody bag; or intangible, like meeting new people, discovering a cheaper way to improve health, such as physical activity, or finding a mutually enjoyable interaction with their grandchildren.

Keep the activities free, or as low cost as possible. Money can be a major barrier for older adults; eliminating that barrier helps to overcome reluctance.

List short-term benefits. With Active Aging Week, the short-term benefits of attending events are the information

and fun that are available. Thinking in terms of changing health behaviors, you may want to talk about additional immediate rewards, such as feeling better, learning a new skill, meeting local heroes or winning a Wii tournament. Immediate rewards can reinforce participation.

Feature recognizable and relevant role models. When people see those who are at similar ages and with similar health

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Captions

- 1.**
Working with personal trainer Robin Maginn, participants in the 'Walk & Hike Your Way into Fitness' session at Spectrum Generations Coastal Community Center in Damariscotta, Maine, learned skills they can continue to use
- 2.**
It's one thing to talk about healthy eating; it's another to make it a lifestyle. Following their fitness walk, Active Aging Week hikers enjoyed fresh watermelon at Heritage Woods, A Kisco Senior Living Community, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The highest participation during the week was at the health and wellness fair, which featured 10 vendors
- 3.**
The right shoes make walking a welcome addition to the day. The week at Ballroom-Utah Dance Studio in Salt Lake City featured education and foot scanning with the local New Balance shoe store
- 4.**
Stringing beads is a challenging activity that can be maintained in a small space and performed with friends. At Capstone village in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, the week included jewelry making



issues engaging in a healthy behavior, they are more likely to be receptive to trying it, too.

Maintain new habits

Now that participants are informed and have sampled a variety of lifestyle options, maintain the momentum with the following ideas.⁴

Small changes work. Reinforce that a few small changes, like lowering salt intake or walking for errands, can bring big benefits.

Break down the barriers to change. What are the issues preventing change? For example, a person who can't cook may think it impossible to change a diet. Attending a cooking class or getting transportation to a farmer's market may overcome the problem, as would working with the chef or cook to offer dining options.

Form groups and clubs, or invite new participants. Social support is an important element of maintaining a behavior. If your organization already has groups

and clubs, encourage their leaders to invite newcomers, or start a new group during the week.

Have referrals ready. It could be that people need more information or support. Where appropriate, refer people to their physicians or let them know about peer support groups that are nearby.

Launch long-term programs. Many hosts have been successful by introducing a new program during Active Aging Week—a new physical activity class, trivia challenge or volunteer opportunity, for example—and then continuing it as a regular offering over the next months or years.

Offer a presentation and then a class on using the Internet for reliable health information. Many older adults search the Internet for health information, but are they finding the best websites? Since seeking health information is a behavior people will likely continue long after Active Aging Week, you can steer them in the right direction.

Teach email skills. A systematic review of 12 studies found that email feedback was one intervention among multiple components that aided lifestyle changes.⁵ If participants use email and you have addresses, could reminders and tips be sent periodically?

Resources at your keyboard

The marketing materials for Active Aging Week 2012 are yours to download from the ICAA website. You'll find resources on the all-important step of setting goals. One goal would be to focus on one or two health behaviors for the week. There are plenty of ideas from past years, different logo formats, fact sheets, media materials and other resources to use.

Also available are numerous articles that offer guidance and advice to help you maximize the Active Aging Week op-

portunity. In the March/April 2012 issue of *ICAA Functional U*[®], for instance, an article appeared on the value of using a theme for your event. Look for more articles to come in upcoming issues.

Small changes, big rewards

During Active Aging Week, it may not be useful to tell participants that interacting socially enhances mental health, participating in new activities stimulates the intellect, or eating healthy snacks is important for maintaining health. But you will know that by planning an atmosphere that sets the stage for change, and programs to help maintain that change, you are having a powerful impact on people's lives. ☺

The sponsors of Active Aging Week 2012 include 24 Hour Fitness, Aegis Therapies, Institute for Preventive Foot Health, Matrix Fitness and Thor•Lo, Inc.

References

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2. Dacey, M. (2009). Link motivation and the stages of change to encourage exercise. *International Council on Active Aging, Functional U*, 7(1), 1; January-February.
3. Work Group for Community Health and Development. (n.d.) Section 1. Understanding Social Marketing: Encouraging Adoption and Use of Valued Products and Practices. The Community Toolbox. University of Kansas. Retrieved May 13, 2012, at http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/section_1321.aspx.
4. Work Group for Community Health and Development. (n.d.) Supporting and Maintaining Behavior Change. The Community Toolbox. University of Kansas. Retrieved May 13, 2012, from http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1871.aspx.
5. Aalbersa, T., Baarsa, M. A. E., & Olde Rikkerta, M. G. M. (2011). Characteristics of effective Internet-mediated interventions to change lifestyle in people aged 50 and older: A systematic review. *Ageing Research Reviews*, 10(4), 487-497; September.

Resources

Active Aging Week

ICAA website
www.icaa.cc/aaw.htm

Active Aging Week on Facebook

Official ICAA site
www.facebook.com/activeagingweek

Gateway to Health Communication & Social Marketing Practice

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/index.html

The Community Toolbox

University of Kansas
Part M
<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/default.aspx>