

## Social connections may lead to better health

Leisure activities, defined as an activity not involving pay, includes many types of activity, from home maintenance and cooking to exercise class or quilting. In 2006 and 2010, a group of 2,965 older people (average 70 years in 2010) was interviewed by telephone. Over half (59%) were married and 84% were white. People who said they had positive social relationships tended to be more involved in leisure activities, and the more people participated in leisure activities, the more the association with better health. Leisure activities involving physical exercise were the most beneficial.

SOURCE: Health Psychology, 33(6):516-523 (June 2014)

Editor's note: The June 2014 issue of Health Psychology has a special theme: "The Role of Social Networks in Adult Health."

## Around the world, obesity prevalence keeps rising

A new analysis from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2013 showed that globally, there has been a rapid increase in rates of obesity and overweight in both adults (28% increase) and children (up by 47%) in the past 33 years, with the number of overweight and obese people rising from 857 million in 1980 to 2.1 billion in 2013. Among the 671 million people who are obese, more than half live in 10 countries: United States (more than 13%), China and India (15% combined), Russia, Brazil, Mexico, Egypt, Germany, Pakistan and Indonesia.

SOURCE: The Lancet, early online publication (May 29, 2014) doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(14)60460-8

## Key health measures show improvement

Data from more than 12 government agencies and research organizations were used to assess 34 measures of health for the US population. Among "seniors," physical inactivity declined from 30.3% of the older adult population in the 2013 report to 28.7% in 2014. Preventable hospitalizations dropped from 66.6 discharges per 1,000 Medicare beneficiaries to 64.9 discharges. However, the percentage of older adults who are obese (body mass 30.0 or higher) increased.

SOURCE: United Health Foundation, America's Health Rankings Senior Report (May 21, 2014)

## Boomers responsible for near doubling of 65+ population

The term “baby boomers” is used to describe people born between the years 1946-1964. As the boomer cohort ages to about 65 years, governments will begin referring to them as “seniors” (their term, not ours). In consequence, the size of the boomer cohort will gradually decline, and “middle age” will be populated by the age cohort nicknamed Generation X.

**PROJECTIONS:** Projections of the ages of the US population (2012) were made using a cohort-component method based on the 2010 Census and official estimates for July 1, 2011. These reports include projected data for 2013-2060, with the Census Bureau's official population estimates used for 2012. Projections assume a certain number of births and deaths.

**FINDINGS:** By the year 2050, the 65-and-older population is projected to reach 83.7 million people, almost double in size from the 2012 level of 43.1 million individuals. A large part of this growth is due to the aging of boomers, who began turning 65 in 2011. The majority of the growth in the 65-and-older population is projected to occur between 2012-2030 as the boomers enter the older age group. In 2050, the population of people 65 years and older is estimated to be about 39.1% of the US population, compared to 20.7% in 2012.

**COMMENT:** “The United States is projected to age significantly over this period, with 20% of its population age 65 and over by 2030,” said Jennifer Ortman, chief of the Census Bureau's Population Projections Branch. “Changes in the age structure of the US population will have implications for health care services and providers, national and local policymakers, and businesses seeking to anticipate the influence that this population may have on their services, family structure and the American landscape.”

**SOURCE:** US Census (May 2014)

## Exercise for fall prevention welcome, but scarce

Recognizing that targeted exercise is a key portion of a program to reduce the risk of falls, a team of researchers was curious how well programs are received by older adults.

**STUDY:** Two surveys were conducted at 94 National Health Service Trusts in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. A questionnaire was completed by people ages 77-86 years-old and by staff members.

**FINDINGS:** Two-thirds of the older adults had attended therapeutic group-exercise classes, usually once a week (85%) for less than 12 weeks (80%). The classes consisted of strength and balance exercises, with 68% of attendees reporting they had used resistance equipment. Fewer (52%) said that the intensity of the exercises increased over time. Almost all (95%) of the older adults were satisfied or very satisfied with the classes. Both older adults and staff members reported that few follow-up classes were available. The authors noted the sessions were of short duration and low intensity.

**COMMENT:** “Despite high levels of patient satisfaction, therapeutic exercise provision was limited and implementation of evidence-based exercise interventions by healthcare providers is incomplete and varies widely,” wrote the authors. “Patients and staff wanted greater availability of long-term exercise services for falls prevention.”

**SOURCE:** Age and Ageing, 43(3):369-374 (May 2014)

## More light during the day calms people with Alzheimer's

People with Alzheimer's disease or dementia may experience changes in their sleep patterns, such as difficulty sleeping or taking naps during the daytime. Among the non-drug treatments are spending time in sunlight in the mornings, along with avoiding stimulants, adhering to a regular schedule and getting daily exercise (Alzheimer's Association).

At the annual meeting of the Associated Professional Sleep Societies, the results of a new study showed that artificial lighting may also help people sleep and reduce other dementia-related behaviors.

**STUDY:** For a pilot study, a light source producing low levels of 300-400 lux (a measurement of illumination, about the amount of light in an office or home) of a bluish-white light was installed in the rooms of 14 people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia who lived in a nursing home. Over four weeks, the residents were exposed to the light during the daytime. Activity and rest patterns were collected by instrument; measures of sleep quality, depression and agitation were collected using standardized questionnaires.

**FINDINGS:** Members of the study group significantly increased sleep quality, sleep efficiency and total sleep duration. They also rated significantly reduced scores for depression and agitation.

**COMMENT:** “It is a simple, inexpensive, non-pharmacological treatment to improve sleep and behavior in Alzheimer's disease and dementia patients,” said principal investigator Mariana Figueiro, PhD, associate professor and Light and Health program director at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. “The improvements we saw in agitation and depression were very impressive.”

**SOURCE:** American Academy of Sleep Medicine (June 4, 2014)

--reported by Patricia Ryan

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