

Healthy Aging



FACING THE ISSUES

- *More than 33 million Americans are older than 65, and that number is expected to double over the next 30 years.*
- *Approximately 80% of older adults have at least one chronic disease (e.g., diabetes, heart disease, cancer, arthritis) and 50% have at least two.*
- *About 12 million older adults living at home have chronic conditions and report limited ability to perform daily activities. Physical limitations decrease quality of life, increase the need for costly long-term care, and make challenging demands on family members and other caregivers.*
- *Older adults can maintain health, independence, and function by avoiding health risks, such as being overweight, and receiving preventive health care, such as screening and vaccination.*

CDC's Prevention Research Centers are striving to dispel the myth that declining health is inevitable with age.

Setting an Agenda

A set of Prevention Research Centers (PRCs) forms a Healthy Aging Network that researches the determinants of healthy aging among older adults, identifies interventions to promote healthy aging, and helps institutionalize sustainable community-based programs throughout the nation. The network's members work with national organizations to identify the most effective programs and consult with federal and state organizations on establishing local programs for healthy aging.

In developing a prevention research agenda for aging populations, the researchers are identifying challenges, such as poverty, limited access to health care and other services, and language and cultural barriers, that affect many aging communities. In one joint project, the researchers are designing and implementing a survey of physical activity programs and opportunities for older adults in different geographical locations. The results may reveal how the public health

community at large can offer programs appropriate for seniors.

Physical Activity for Healthy Aging

The Healthy Aging Network and several individual centers are especially concerned with encouraging and increasing physical activity among older adults. Physical activity helps increase mobility, flexibility, and strength and improves coordination and balance, all of which are essential for older adults in performing daily activities and maintaining independence. When combined with other healthy lifestyle choices, physical activity can reduce the risk for chronic disease and the rate of disability.

Some centers focus physical activity research for older adults on specific ethnic or cultural groups, particularly those affected by health disparities. For example, Healthy Path is a PRC project exploring how to help Navajo elders make healthy dietary and physical activity choices,



The Prevention Research Centers are a network of academic health centers, partner communities, and public health practitioners that conduct community-based participatory research to prevent disease and disability.

specifically for the prevention of diabetes, which disproportionately affects American Indian populations. The project incorporates the traditional beliefs, values, and foods of the Navajo culture into educational and activity interventions.

Other Focus Areas for Healthy Aging

Arthritis. About 60% of the U.S. population age 65 or older have arthritis or other chronic joint disabilities. Researchers at one PRC are testing a self-care training program, Arthritis Basics for Change (ABC). This program provides an educational kit on arthritis that participants can study on their own. To test the program's effectiveness, participants are asked how using the kit affected their level of pain, depression, arthritis knowledge, self-efficacy, and daily activity. Focus groups will determine whether the program materials are useful, relevant, and easy to read and understand. If proven effective, ABC will be made available to people with arthritis who have limited access to educational programs.

Depression. Depression among older adults can contribute to problems in daily functioning and a diminished sense of well-being. Researchers at one PRC are testing whether the treatment of minor depression among chronically ill

and homebound older adults reduces symptoms of depression and improves functioning and quality of life. Participants receive counseling sessions periodically for 19 weeks. Some participants are encouraged to seek the physical and social benefits of senior center

Spotlight on Success

In 2003, the Lifetime Fitness Program, developed and tested by PRC researchers and their community partners, was recognized by the National Council on Aging as one of the top ten physical activity programs for U.S. seniors. Older adults who participated in this program have shown significant improvements in physical and social functioning as well as decreases in levels of pain and depression. Health care costs have also been significantly reduced for seniors who participated in the program at least once a week. The program is now offered at 64 community sites in six states.

activities, and physicians are contacted for patients who seem likely to benefit from medication. If results are positive, the researchers will work with local service agencies to develop a wide-scale program for identifying and treating depression in older adults.

Epilepsy. One-third of people with newly diagnosed epilepsy are age 60 or older, but little information exists about the effects of epilepsy and seizure disorders in this age group. Researchers at one PRC are studying the psychosocial status, mental acuity, mobility, modifications to physical surroundings, use of assistive devices, and quality of life among older adults and how these factors differ between people who have epilepsy and those who do not. Results will provide insight on the needs of older adults with epilepsy.

Immunization. More than 40,000 people age 65 or older die each year of influenza (flu) and invasive pneumococcal disease. Researchers at one PRC are learning what discourages older adults from receiving vaccinations. Older African American and white adults from both rural and urban areas were asked to identify and rank the major deterrents to their receiving vaccinations. Results were used to develop and test a questionnaire for assessing the barriers to and incentives for vaccination and to identify racial differences in factors associated with the likelihood of being vaccinated.

Adults at any age can improve their health by adopting a healthier lifestyle. The PRCs are proving this every day.