

**2 News Briefs**

- E-cigarettes pose health risks.
- Sudden cardiac arrest warning signs.
- Sleep apnea may damage brain tissue.

**3 AFib increases stroke risk**

You may have this heart disorder and not know it.

**4 Sleep apnea is underdiagnosed**

Treating this common condition may improve mental health.

**5 Testosterone therapy**

Benefits and risks for men and women.

**6 High-Intensity Interval Training**

A fast, effective exercise method.

**7 Nutrition know-how**

Natural solutions for a better night's rest.

**8 Ask Dr. Ferrell**

- Am I depressed?
- Can aspirin prevent cancer?
- What can I do about dry eye?

## Healthy Aging: Stop acting your age

*Creativity boosts your health and quality of life.*

Watching an artist paint, a dancer gracefully glide across the stage, or a singer belt out a happy tune is witnessing bliss personified. Children can find that joyful state of absorption rather easily: A single crayon on paper can do it. As adults, however, we often lose that sense of blissful play. But it can be found again.

“Because the arts serve as an emotional and physical outlet, it also helps to decrease stress, combat depression and loneliness,” explains Erica Curtis, board certified art therapist and instructor for the UCLA Arts and Healing Social Emotional Arts (SEA) certificate program. “It’s a healthy means of distraction from pains, discomfort or other stressors.”

### The power of making music together

Researchers from the University of Oxford wanted to explore whether there was something special about singing as a bonding behavior or whether any group activity would build bonds among members. To test the theory, they set up seven courses; four in singing, two in crafts and one in creative writing. Each course, made up of weekly sessions, was run over seven months. Those attending the classes were given surveys before and after individual sessions in the first month, in the third month and at the end of the course. In it, they were asked to rate how close they felt to their classmates.

At the end of the seven months, all the participants reported similar levels of closeness, but those in the singing group stated feeling closer to their classmates earlier in the process.

Singing also requires breath control, which can improve lung function and decrease stress. A small study found that regular singing might have a positive effect for those who have COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease).



Thinkstock

*Playfulness is healthy for mind, body and spirit.*

Learning to play an instrument, or dusting off one you used play, can work wonders on your mood. A study published in the journal *Mental Health Practice* found that the use of music as a therapy for people over the age of 65 has a positive influence on well-being by providing enjoyment, social interaction, improved memory and social inclusion.

### Moving your feet to the beat feels good and may reduce fall risk

Osteoarthritis is common in seniors, and movement helps provide circulation to ease the pain of arthritis. Dancing alone or with others can be a great way to feel better fast. In a small study from St. Louis University Medical Center, researchers found that dancing eased hip and knee pain and also helped older adults move better. The findings are especially noteworthy because they point out that older adults who walk too slowly are more likely to fall, become hospitalized or require care from others. Dancing requires coordination, balance and control—all useful

*Continued on page 7*

## EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Bruce A. Ferrell, MD  
UCLA Division of Geriatrics

## EXECUTIVE EDITOR

JoAnn Milivojevic

## GROUP DIRECTOR

Jay Roland

## ADVISORY BOARD

Randall Espinoza, MD, MPH;  
Arash Naeim, MD;  
Michelle Eslami, MD;  
John FitzGerald, MD;  
Ellen Wilson, PT

**B** *Healthy Years*  
(ISSN # 1551 4617)  
is published  
monthly for \$39  
per year by Belvoir  
Media Group, LLC,  
535 Connecticut  
Avenue, Norwalk, CT 06854-1713.  
Robert Englander, Chairman and  
CEO; Timothy H. Cole, Executive  
Vice President, Editorial Director;  
Philip L. Penny, Chief Operating  
Officer; Greg King, Executive Vice  
President, Marketing Director;  
Ron Goldberg, Chief Financial  
Officer; Tom Canfield, Vice  
President, Circulation. © 2016  
Belvoir Media Group, LLC.  
Postmaster: Send address  
corrections to *Healthy Years*,  
PO Box 8535, Big Sandy, TX  
75755-8535.

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

\$39 per year (U.S.)  
\$49 per year (Canada)

## SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

For customer service or  
subscription information:  
*Healthy Years*  
PO Box 8535  
Big Sandy, TX 75755-8535  
Call toll free 866-343-1812

## ONLINE SERVICES

Visit [www.healthy-years.com/cs](http://www.healthy-years.com/cs)  
to change your address, renew  
your subscription, check your  
account status, or contact a  
customer service representative.**E-cigarette vapors may pose health risks**

According to researchers from the Penn State College of Medicine, there is a perception that e-cigarettes (also called vapors) may be safe or at least not as harmful as traditional cigarettes. Their recent research, published in the journal *Chemical Research in Toxicology*, suggests otherwise. Just like traditional cigarettes, e-cigarettes contain nicotine, an addictive substance. Instead of smoke, battery-operated e-cigarettes produce aerosols, tiny liquid particles suspended in a puff of air. Low levels of aldehydes, chemical compounds that can cause oxidative stress and cell damage, as well as free radicals have been found in the vapors. Highly reactive free radicals are a leading culprit in smoking-related cancer, cardiovascular disease and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. According to the researchers, the levels of free radicals in the e-cigs are more than what you might get from a heavily air-polluted area but less than what you might find in cigarette smoke. The free radicals are produced when the device's heating coil heats the nicotine solution to very high temperatures. E-cigarettes are not FDA regulated and have not been shown to help people stop smoking, despite claims to the contrary. Quitting smoking requires multiple attempts and support. Studies have shown that periodic text messages can help people quit. SmokefreeTXT is a free mobile text messaging service from [smokefree.gov](http://smokefree.gov) that delivers tips, motivation and fact-based information to help people stop smoking.

**Sudden cardiac arrest may have some warning signs that could reduce fatalities**

Although medical science has long regarded sudden cardiac arrest as a deadly condition that strikes without warning, a recent study led by an associate director of the Cedars-Sinai Heart Institute shows that many patients experience warning symptoms up to a month before having a cardiac arrest. More than half of patients who have a sudden cardiac arrest ignore symptoms occurring up to a month prior to the usually fatal heart rhythm malfunction even though medical intervention potentially could save their lives, according to the study published by the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. The study included 839 patients between the ages of 35 and 65. Half the patients experienced warning signs prior to cardiac arrest—most commonly chest pain. “These new findings give good reason not to ignore unusual sensations, as vague as they may be,” said Eduardo Marbán, MD, PhD, director of the Cedars-Sinai Heart Institute. “Better to seek medical attention early than to risk dying suddenly.” The patients who experienced symptoms and sought medical help had a survival rate of 32 percent. Those who did not seek medical treatment for their symptoms had a survival rate of only six percent.

**Sleep apnea may contribute to brain tissue damage**

In a small study, UCLA researchers reported that obstructive sleep apnea contributes to a breakdown of the blood-brain barrier. That barrier plays an important role in protecting brain tissue by limiting harmful bacteria, infections and chemicals from reaching the brain. The study appeared in the *Journal of Neuroimaging*. “We found that the blood-brain barrier becomes more permeable in obstructive sleep apnea, a breakdown that could contribute to brain injury, as well as potentially enhancing or accelerating the damage,” says Rajesh Kumar, PhD, associate professor of anesthesiology and a member of the UCLA Brain Research Institute. “This type of brain injury in obstructive sleep apnea has significant consequences to memory, mood and cardiovascular risk, but physicians and researchers have developed pharmacologic and non-pharmacologic therapeutic strategies to repair blood-brain barrier function in other conditions.” It is theorized that the damage may, in part, result from reduced oxygen because of the repeated breathing interruptions during sleep apnea. While previous studies have found that reduced exposure to oxygen and high blood pressure can affect the blood-brain barrier, which in turn can lead to or enhance existing brain-tissue injury, Dr. Kumar and his colleagues are the first to show that this breakdown occurs in obstructive sleep apnea. Researchers are planning to conduct a larger study to confirm their current findings. ■

# You can have AFib and not know it

*This heart rhythm disorder increases stroke risk.*

It's estimated that nearly 3 million Americans have AFib (atrial fibrillation) and many may not even be aware that they have this condition. AFib is an abnormal heart rhythm in the upper chambers of the heart (atria). It is caused by disordered electrical activity, which results in an irregular and often rapid heartbeat. While there are many reasons for this electrical heart malfunction to occur, age is a risk factor. AFib is the most common type of irregular heartbeat (also called arrhythmia) in people over the age of 65.

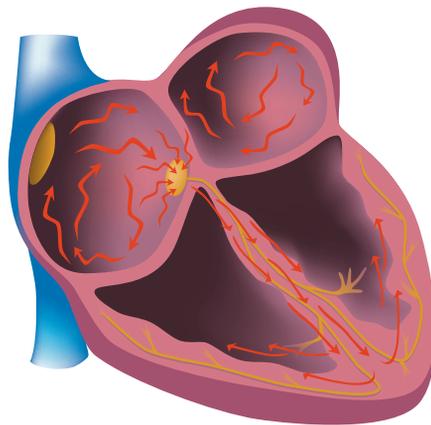
"It's typically associated with other medical problems such as high blood pressure, heart valve problems and scarring fibrosis in the atrium, all of which also increase with age," explains Noel Gerard Boyle, MD, PhD, director of the cardiac electrophysiology labs at the UCLA Cardiac Arrhythmia Center.

## Potentially serious consequences when ignored

AFib can feel like the heartbeat is quivering or skipping beats. Some people might feel dizzy or short of breath, but it's possible not to feel anything at all. It's estimated that as many as 50 percent of people with AFib don't realize that they have the disorder because they may not have any obvious symptoms. The consequences of untreated AFib, however, can be very serious. For those who are asymptomatic, a stroke may be the first time they are diagnosed with AFib. A visit to your primary care doctor can reveal reasons for further diagnostics.

"Everybody over 65 should have their pulse checked by their doctor when they visit," recommends Dr. Boyle. "If the pulse isn't regular, that is an indication for further investigation with an ECG test or 24-hour heart monitoring."

For blood to properly circulate



*AFib causes erratic electrical impulses in the heart's upper chambers, which can feel like a quivering sensation.*

around your body, you need a coordinated heart rhythm. When this rhythm is interrupted, blood can pool inside the left atrial heart chamber, which can lead to clot formation. If the clot reaches the brain, it can cause a stroke. AFib is responsible for about 20 percent of strokes, and strokes that are linked with AFib are frequently the most serious and potentially fatal. Other problems that may result from untreated AFib include possible heart failure, chronic fatigue, and issues resulting from poor blood circulation. A recent study from the *British Medical Journal* reported that women with atrial fibrillation are twice as likely to suffer a stroke than men.

## Risk factors for AFib include:

- Uncontrolled blood pressure
- Thyroid disease
- Excessive use of alcohol
- Obstructive sleep apnea (see page 4)

## Treatable but no cure yet

Patients with atrial fibrillation are often prescribed oral anticoagulation (OAC) therapy, also known as blood thinners. OAC therapy can prevent disastrous strokes, but at the expense of increased bleeding risks when not

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

- **Some people** may not feel any symptoms, but having atrial fibrillation can have serious consequences if left untreated.
- **AFib** increases stroke risk.
- **Compared to men**, women with AFib have double the stroke risk.
- **A heart-healthy lifestyle** can decrease symptoms and severity.

carefully monitored and controlled. Warfarin (Coumadin), the most commonly prescribed blood thinner, has side effects such as interactions with some foods, prescription medicines and over-the-counter supplements. For these reasons, some patients are wary about taking blood thinners, but Dr. Boyle points out that there have been several new FDA-approved formulations in the past few years that can help reduce some of the side effects.

"The newer drugs are effective and work quickly," says Dr. Boyle. "Warfarin gets a lot of bad press, but for most people it's quite safe. Regardless of which blood thinner is prescribed, patients need to be monitored closely and regularly." Aspirin, however, is not an adequate blood thinner for this condition.

And, according to Dr. Boyle, managing AFib with medications may require trying several different drugs before knowing which is the right medication for a particular patient.

For patients who cannot be successfully treated pharmacologically there are surgical treatment options. Catheter-based ablation procedures aim to eliminate tissue that can cause irregular heartbeats. One type of procedure is known as pulmonary vein isolation (PVI) as these veins are often a source for AFib.

Lifestyle modifications can help decrease the chance of developing AFib. Regular exercise can help reduce stress, regulate body weight and improve sleep. Controlling blood pressure and cholesterol also helps reduce onset risk and AFib severity. ■



## Treating sleep apnea can improve mental health

*Getting a good night's rest can protect your brain and reduce dementia risk.*

**O**bststructive sleep apnea becomes increasingly prevalent in both men and women with age. One in four adults over the age of 65 are estimated to have their sleep cycle disrupted by this disorder. It's especially worrisome because some people may be unaware of it.

"It is one of the most common and important sleep disorders to treat because it can lead to serious medical, psychiatric, and neurological disorders," says Alon Y. Avidan, MD, MPH, director of the UCLA Sleep Disorders Center.

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) is often simply referred to as sleep apnea. OSA is a mechanical problem that occurs when the tissue in the back of the throat collapses preventing airflow. While aging is a risk factor for OSA, it should not be accepted as a normal part of getting older.

### Treating sleep apnea may reduce concurrent depression

A recent study showed that nearly 73 percent of sleep apnea patients (213 of 293 patients) had clinically significant depressive symptoms at the start of the study (baseline). When OSA worsens so does depression. But with just three months of treatment with continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) therapy, clinically significant depressive symptoms remained in only four percent of the sleep apnea patients.

Researchers say the findings highlight the potential for sleep apnea, a notoriously under-diagnosed condition, to be misdiagnosed as depression. Study results appeared in the *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine*.

### Symptoms are similar but there are important gender differences

Not all snoring is sleep apnea, but severe and loud snoring is a symptom of sleep apnea. Other symptoms for both men and women include:

- Morning headaches
- Memory or learning problems
- Inability to concentrate
- Feeling irritable, depressed, or having mood swings

A recent UCLA study showed that autonomic responses (involuntary functions) such as blood pressure, heart rate, and sweating, are weaker in people with OSA, but even more so in females than males. While women with sleep apnea may appear to be healthy, their symptoms tend to be subtler, which often means their sleep problem is missed and they get diagnosed with other conditions.

"It was originally seen as a male disease," explains Paul Macey, PhD, lead researcher of the study and Associate Professor and Director of Information Technology and Innovation at the UCLA School of Nursing. "Women with sleep apnea also tend to have worse levels of depression and anxiety compared to men."

Because of that, women may be treated only for mental health issues and the sleep apnea may remain in the background. Untreated, OSA is likely to get worse, causing greater impact to existing mental issues and perhaps leading to other negative health consequences.

### Lifestyle choices matter

If you suspect sleep apnea, there are several strategies you can try to reduce symptoms. Lose weight if

### WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

- **Sleep disorders** are frequently underdiagnosed.
- **Depression**, anxiety, and difficulty concentrating often accompany sleep apnea.
- **Losing weight** can reduce sleep apnea severity.
- **Alternative treatments** are available and very effective for some patients.

you are overweight, sleep on your side to reduce the gravitational effect of your tongue on your throat, and don't smoke.

"Alcohol is bad news for sleep apnea," explains Dr. Avidan. "It makes breathing more difficult and can turn someone with a little snoring into someone who has full sleep apnea."

Most patients with sleep apnea benefit immediately from a CPAP machine. Although some patients do complain about discomforts, Dr. Avidan recommends consulting with a sleep expert who can help you get a proper fit and appropriate air pressure. Like finding the right pair of jeans, trying a different mask or making a slight adjustment can make a big difference in comfort. For those who can't tolerate CPAP, a dental repositioning device, or surgical intervention may be an option.

Inspire® Upper Airway Stimulation, is a new FDA-approved surgical treatment for people with moderate to severe OSA. The fully implanted system delivers mild stimulation to key airway muscles, which keeps the airway open during sleep.

OSA diagnosis is typically done in a sleep center. But it may be possible to diagnosis it through a convenient at-home sleep test kit, which must be prescribed by a physician.

Some supplements and foods may help you get a better night's sleep. To learn more about which may be worth a try, turn to the nutrition section on page 7. ■

# Testosterone replacement for men and women

*Knowing your baseline level is key to therapy.*

**A**ds for testosterone replacement run rampant across television, print publications, the Internet and likely land in your email box, too. Promises include improved energy, muscle tone and libido. But before you rush off to your doctor and request testosterone therapy, you need to know your baseline testosterone level, whether you are a man or woman.

“It’s a potent hormone that needs to be administered and monitored carefully,” says Sander Greenland, PhD, professor of epidemiology and statistics at UCLA. “If levels are low, supplementation may be warranted. If not, taking testosterone could push you into the danger zone—especially if you have cardiovascular risk factors.”

## Establishing baseline levels to test and treat

Before taking any hormones, a physician will typically order a blood test. The blood panel establishes a baseline for a wide variety of hormones, such as insulin, thyroid, cortisol and sex hormones (e.g. testosterone, estrogen, progesterone). Hormones circulate throughout the body all day long and levels fluctuate throughout the day. The ideal strategy is to test in the morning and to consistently test at the same time of day in the future. When attempting to balance hormones, it’s a test and treat method. Thus, periodic tests are needed to monitor hormones to ensure optimum levels.

## Testosterone therapy for women: Off-label and compounded treatments

Testosterone plays a valuable role in women’s health. Like men, women



*Regular tests are needed for testosterone therapy.*

are most often prescribed testosterone for loss of sexual desire, but the hormone plays other important roles in women’s bodies as well. There are few testosterone studies in women, but recent clinical trials suggest that testosterone enhances cognitive performance and improves musculoskeletal health in postmenopausal women.

The fact that no current formulation has been FDA approved exclusively for women has not impeded the widespread use of testosterone off-label or in compounded therapies. Off-label uses of medications are not unusual. Off-label means that a medication is being used for a different disease, population or other dosages than what was initially approved by the FDA. For example, a physician may prescribe testosterone medications intended for men but in much smaller amounts to serve the needs of women. Compounding pharmacies, typically run by a licensed pharmacist, mix and combine ingredients of a drug to create a medication tailored to the needs of an individual patient. Though the individual ingredients may be FDA approved, the compounded medications are not. Further study is needed to determine the effectiveness and safety of long-term use of testosterone by women.

## Testosterone therapy in men: Risks and benefits

As part of a study with the National Institutes of Health, Dr. Greenland and his colleagues analyzed data from Truven Health Analytics, which aggregates information on patient

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

- > **Establish** a baseline hormone level.
- > **Start** with the lowest dose possible.
- > **Monitor** levels with blood tests.

care. They examined the health care records of 55,593 men who had been prescribed testosterone therapy—48,539 were under the age of 65, and 7,054 were 65 or older. Their research found a twofold increase of cardiovascular risk in men under 65 with heart disease. They also confirmed an earlier finding that showed a twofold increase in men over 65 with or without heart disease. It’s important to point out, however, that the data analyzed didn’t specify whether or not a baseline testosterone level had been established. It is, therefore, possible that some men’s testosterone levels were too high with added therapy. That is why periodic monitoring of hormone levels is vital.

## Connecting symptoms with solutions

There also may be some confusion about which symptoms testosterone therapy can actually improve. For example, some of the problems that aging men experience, such as decreased energy, increased body fat, and low libido might be due to something other than low testosterone levels. Chronic diseases such as high blood pressure and diabetes can contribute to those complaints as can some medications that treat those diseases.

For men who do have low testosterone and no prior history of heart disease, treatment may be an appropriate. There are many uncertainties about the role of testosterone in female health, and while the risks and side effects are rare if the level is kept within the female normal range, high doses may cause side effects. Periodic tests to assess hormone levels are recommended for anyone undergoing any hormone therapy. ■

# High-Intensity Interval Training

*It's a quick and effective way to improve physical fitness.*

**H**igh-intensity interval training, or HIIT, has become increasingly popular because it is an efficient and effective way to achieve results. The words “high-intensity” might make some seniors leery of the idea. But HIIT is an appropriate method for just about everyone because high-intensity is a relative term. You determine how long to do each interval and you define the intensity (difficulty) according to your current fitness level.

“During the intensive phase, you want to be at 70 to 90 percent of your peak power,” explains Karen Hamill, physical therapist, UCLA Department of Rehabilitation. “You need to warm up appropriately, however, because you will be moving more quickly and going all out during the high-intensity phase.”

## Intense bursts and active recovery build cardiovascular fitness

A good way to get started with HIIT is with a stationary bike, elliptical machine or treadmill with a timer. Begin with a five-minute warm-up and then start the intervals portion. Basically, you will be doing repetitive bursts of challenging cardiovascular activity followed by lower levels for active recovery. For example, pedal or walk at your maximum ability for one minute, and then slow it down for one minute. Repeat that sequence for 20 minutes and then cool down for five minutes.

This kind of training keeps your heart rate up moderately during the recovery phase, which makes it especially beneficial for cardiovascular conditioning. Many machines have



pre-programmed intervals that automatically alternate between hills and flat terrain or easy and difficult pedal strokes. They also allow you to easily change intensity if it becomes too hard or too easy. The built-in heart monitors on the machines are helpful but they aren't the most accurate. Another way to judge how hard you are working is by noticing

your breathing pattern.

“The higher the intensity, the more difficult it is to breathe,” explains Hamill. “With moderate intensity, you can still carry on a conversation, but with high-intensity you can't.”

HIIT requires concentration and deliberate intention. You have to time your interval phases and control your effort levels. That kind of focus can make an exercise session fly by more quickly because your mind is very much involved in the process. This more mindful process also helps you become more aware of your body by feeling the difference between moderate and hard exertion.

## Studies on HIIT show it improves physical fitness and overall health

According to research presented at the American Heart Association's Scientific Sessions 2015, short bursts of high-intensity exercise improved cholesterol, blood sugar and weight among Type 2 diabetes patients more effectively than 30 minutes of sustained, lower-intensity exercise. The study was conducted in 76 patients with Type 2 diabetes (70 percent male, average age 67) who were recruited for the study shortly after their diagnosis.

Similarly, research conducted

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

- **HIIT** is a highly effective and efficient exercise method.
- **Workouts** are short and intense, with minimal recovery times.
- **High-Intensity** is defined as 70 to 90 percent of maximal effort.
- **Include** warm-up, cool-down and stretch.

at the University of Kansas Medical Center found that older adults can improve brain function by raising their fitness level.

“For improved brain function, the results suggest that it's not enough just to exercise more,” said Eric Vidoni, a research associate professor of neurology at KU Medical Center. “You have to do it in a way that bumps up your overall fitness level.”

The HIIT method is based on the Tabata protocol, which was first described by the Japanese scientist Izumi Tabata in 1996. The workout was created to maximize results in athletes. The original sequence was designed as follows:

- 5-minute warm-up
- 8 intervals of 20-second all-out intensity followed by 10 seconds of rest
- 2-minute cool-down

The HIIT method is typically used for cardiovascular fitness, but it can also be applied to resistance training. A warm-up and cool-down are important to each application as are flexibility exercises.

“Stretch afterward,” advises Hamill, “because that's when you have the most flexibility from the added blood flow of exercise.”

The main point of HIIT is to keep alternating from intense to moderate activity. Intervals can be shorter or longer depending on your current fitness level. A personal trainer can help design the ideal HIIT plan for you. If you are out of shape, overweight, and/or take multiple medications, see your doctor before you begin any type of new exercise. ■

## Healthy aging—cont. from page 1

in preventing falls. Styles of dance exercise classes include everything from Zumba Gold (a less intense version of the Latin-inspired dance class) to more free-form styles such as Nia.

There are also more formal partner dance classes where you can learn everything from salsa to waltz. Most programs don't require you to have your own partner. In fact, they're a great way to meet new people.

### Play with paper and online games

Adult coloring books have become quite popular and can be an enjoyable way to play with crayons, colored pencils and paints. For those who prefer to draw outside the lines, the choices are virtually unlimited. Head to a craft store for inspiration. You'll find all sorts of colors, glitter, glue and printed tape and stickers.



*Dancing improves mood and can ease arthritis pain.*

Here are a few ideas:

- ➔ Clip images from magazines to create a collage.
- ➔ Arrange old photos and memorabilia into scrapbooks.
- ➔ Try online painting programs to doodle digitally.

Online art games designed for children are typically easy to use and offer the mental challenge of drawing with computer tools. When it comes to online games, one study found

that seniors who occasionally played online video games reported higher levels well-being than their non-gaming counterparts.

“Arts participation enhances overall quality of life, including emotional and physical well-being,” says Curtis. “Older adults can feel a sense of connection with others by participating in a shared creative activity or simply by sharing their creative expression, such

as a drawing or painting with friends, loved ones or caretakers.”

You can find adult art and dance classes through local universities, community centers, at churches, the YMCA and park districts. Before you sign up, you may want to visit the center, observe a class and talk with the instructor. Curtis recommends looking for classes that are respectful of individual expression and feel inspiring to you. ■

## NUTRITION

# Natural ways to help you sleep

*Try these foods and supplements for better slumber*

Falling and staying asleep can be a struggle at times, but there are some simple strategies that may help you get your 40 winks.

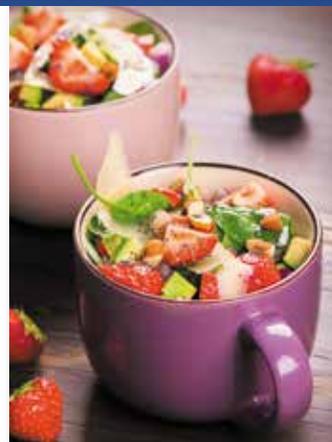
### Supplement your sleep

When it gets dark, the body automatically starts to release melatonin, a hormone which naturally induces sleep. But light, even artificial light, gets in the way of melatonin production. Even dim glows, like those from computers, cell phones and e-book readers, can be a problem. So, to get your shut-eye sooner, you have to shut off your devices.

According to the National Institutes of Health, older adults may produce less melatonin. As a supplement to aid sleep, melatonin is best taken about an hour before bedtime. Studies

suggest the supplement may reduce the time it takes to fall asleep. It can also be helpful in resetting sleep/wake patterns disrupted by jet lag.

The mineral magnesium helps your brain settle down for sleep. Older adults typically have lower dietary intakes of magnesium than younger adults. Magnesium absorption also decreases with age. It can be helpful, therefore, to get more magnesium through foods such as green leafy vegetables, wheat germ, and almonds. Magnesium is also available as a supplement. If you are taking medications, consult with your doctor before taking any supplements.



*A healthy diet can improve sleep quality.*

### A better diet aids sleep

A recent study from the American Academy of Sleep Medicine reported that people who ate more fiber tended to spend more time in restorative deep, slow-wave sleep compared to those

who ate more saturated fat and sugar. While a light snack before bed can help you sleep, eating a heavy dinner can keep you awake. Likewise, caffeine can stay in your system for eight hours.

Your best bet for a nightcap is an herbal tea. A cup of chamomile tea, shown to have mildly sedative properties, can help you relax and fall asleep naturally.

Poor sleep and groggy days may signal sleep apnea (see page 4) so talk with your doctor. ■



Editor-in-Chief  
Bruce A. Ferrell,  
MD, Professor of  
Medicine and  
Geriatrics

**Q** One of my best friends passed away recently, and I feel so unmotivated. To be honest, I'd rather just stay home in my bathrobe and watch TV. How can I tell the difference between feeling blue and actually being depressed?

**A** I'm sorry for your loss, but know that it's normal to feel sad. Major life events, such as the death of a loved one, divorce, or receiving a dire diagnosis, can send anyone into a temporarily depressed state. In fact, depression often occurs at the same time as another serious illness, such as heart disease, stroke, and cancer. Symptoms of depression include using substances such as alcohol just to get through the day, being unable to focus on even the most routine tasks of daily life, such as preparing meals or getting dressed; chronic fatigue, feeling worthless, helpless, and pessimistic for days at a time are also classic signs of a mood disorder. It's important to realize that being depressed is not a normal part of aging. Because dementia can occur with aging, consulting with a geriatric psychiatrist is an ideal choice for seniors. Treatment for depression includes cognitive therapy, where you talk about your thoughts and feelings. Even if you're not clinically depressed, consider reaching out to a licensed therapist. Talking through your sorrow with a professional can provide relief and help you move forward with your life.

**Q** I've heard that taking an aspirin every day can reduce my risk of cancer. Is that true, and should I take it?

**A** It depends on your health status. There have been some recent studies suggesting that aspirin may reduce cancer risk. But as of now, there are no public health organizations prescribing the use of it for that purpose. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recently released draft recommendations about using aspirin to help prevent diseases, including cardiovascular diseases (heart attacks and strokes) and colorectal cancer. The inclusion of colorectal cancer as part of these guidelines is a

first. The USPSTF is a government-appointed, but independent, panel of medical experts. The panel will review the feedback from other experts before making a final decision. Among the reasons researchers are studying aspirin as a potential for cancer prevention is because it blocks the action of two enzymes known as COX-1 and COX-2. Those enzymes trigger inflammation, which is the body's normal response to injury. Sometimes, the inflammation response doesn't turn off, resulting in chronic inflammation. That can cause DNA mutations and new blood vessels to form, which can spur the growth of tumors. Some studies have shown that an aspirin regimen may be of benefit, but only when the cancer is due to a particular kind of cell growth. There are risks and benefits to taking aspirin as a preventive measure. Talk to your doctor to determine if it may be the right course for you.

**Q** My eyes often feel dry and sometimes itchy, too. It's very annoying. Is there something I can do about it?

**A** Dry eyes can happen at any age, but it's more widespread in seniors and is more prevalent in postmenopausal women. But it happens to men, too. Outdoor or indoor allergens may cause dry, itchy eyes. Dry eyes can also be a side effect of some medications, including antihistamines, nasal decongestants, tranquilizers, certain blood pressure medicines, Parkinson's medications, and some antidepressants. Some people experience dry eyes after eye surgery to correct vision or cosmetic surgery around the eyes. The goal of any dry eye treatment is to lubricate your eyes. Over-the-counter remedies such as artificial tears, gels and ointments may help. It's best to avoid remedies that contain preservatives. A humidifier may also help if the air in your home is dry. Air purifiers may also be helpful if allergies are the cause. Resting your eyes is useful, especially if you use computerized devices for long periods of time. If over-the-counter products don't work, see your eye doctor. ■

## IN COMING ISSUES

**NUTRITION—**  
How some foods may reduce chronic pain.

**HEALTHY AGING—**  
Exercise myths and how to overcome them.

**MEDICATION—**  
Opioid addiction and older adults.

### SUBSCRIPTIONS

\$39 per year (U.S.)  
\$49 per year (Canada)  
Reprints for publication and web posting available

For subscriber and customer service information, write to: *Healthy Years*  
PO Box 8535  
Big Sandy, TX 75755-8535  
Call toll-free: 866-343-1812

### EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE

Executive Editor  
*Healthy Years*  
P.O. Box 5656  
Norwalk, CT 06856-5656

HealthyYears@belvoirpubs.com

We regret that we cannot answer letters or e-mails personally.

**REPRINTS/WEB POSTING AVAILABLE**  
Contact Jennifer Jimolka, Belvoir Media Group, 203-857-3144

### ONLINE SERVICE

View your current subscription information online at [www.healthy-years.com/cs](http://www.healthy-years.com/cs). You may also renew your subscription, change your address, or contact customer service online. Express written permission is required to reproduce, in any manner, the contents of this issue, either in full or in part. For more information, write to Permissions, *Healthy Years*, P.O. Box 5656, Norwalk, CT 06856-5656.

### DISCLAIMER

*Healthy Years* is intended to provide readers with accurate and timely medical news and information. It is not intended to give personal medical advice, which should be obtained directly from a physician. Acting on any information provided without first consulting a physician is solely at the reader's risk. We regret that we cannot respond to individual inquiries about personal health matters.

From time to time, we make our list of subscribers available to carefully screened institutions and organizations offering products or services we believe you may be interested in. If you would prefer that we not release your name to these organizations, just let us know. Please include the mailing label from your issue with your request, and send it to the customer service address at the left.