

## **Staying Active! An Essential Habit for Healthy Aging**

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“If exercise could be packaged into a pill, it would be the single most widely prescribed and beneficial medicine in the nation” stated Robert N. Butler, MD (Former Director, National Institute on Aging).

Just the other day I had a client share with me her concern about her mother not being active. Mary stated that her mother now has limited mobility and she feels this is an excuse to no longer exercise. I reminded Mary that many women of her mother’s generation didn’t even exercise when they were younger and that the key is to now find something that her mother both enjoys and that is safe for her to participate in. Mary expressed concern, admitting that she didn’t even know where to begin to find information on available activity options for her mother.

Staying active and working with your physician to identify a consistent exercise program can help prevent or delay some diseases and disabilities as people grow older. Research continues to show that even a small amount of exercise such as walking for ten minutes a day can improve stamina, muscle strength, and overall well-being. Maintaining a healthy, active lifestyle strengthens bones, creates more flexibility while maintaining muscle strength, and increases energy while promoting a healthy body, mind and spirit. Mary and her mother share a common bond with other families in the possible fear of strenuous exercise and fear of injury relating to falls.

Many local resources are available to our aging population including those available through Caregiver Resource Network member organizations. The American Red Cross of Greater Grand Rapids is one such organization, and I have been asked to provide information about local senior fitness resources.

With our focus shifting to the 2008 Olympics, I would like to highlight one such resource-the Michigan Senior Olympics program. This organization was founded in 1979 and is dedicated to providing wellness opportunities for the 50 plus population. The MSO provides advocacy and programs relating to health, fitness, wellness and nutrition. For more information on the annual Michigan Senior Olympic games, please visit their website at [www.michiganseniorolympics.org](http://www.michiganseniorolympics.org).

Aging Well Staying Active provides details on the benefits of exercise, safety first, and sample exercises for seniors to try. These programs are listed on the Michigan State website at [www.michigan.gov/miseniors](http://www.michigan.gov/miseniors). Activity recommendations for older adults and charting techniques are also listed with links to CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) recommendations.

“Physical activity is one of the most important steps older adults can take to maintain physical and mental health and quality of life. Scientists have proven that being active

can help reduce the risk of obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, osteoporosis, stroke, depression, colon cancer, and premature death. Yet today, more than 60% of older adults are inactive” states the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

[www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/everyone/recommendations/older\\_adults.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/everyone/recommendations/older_adults.htm)

[Strength training is recommended for all adults, but it is a vital link to health for older adults. The reason is that strength training prevents sarcopenia, the muscle deterioration that comes with aging, and also helps maintain bone mass. "Stronger people have better health outcomes," noted Dr. David Buchner, Chief of CDC's Physical Activity and Health Branch and renowned Gerontologist. However, some elderly people avoid physical activity and become sedentary out of fear of falling and fracturing a bone. Dr. Buchner added that emerging data indicate that physical activity can prevent falls by improving strength, balance, and endurance.] CDC

Depending on each person's abilities and personalities, programs can be designed to not only strengthened the body but promote socialization with other members of the community who share these common needs around fitness and healthy aging. Many of our senior and community centers offer classes such as Tai chi, chair yoga, and aquatic exercise programs.

To locate additional local resources promoting healthy aging and fall prevention, visit our website at [www.caregiverresource.net](http://www.caregiverresource.net) or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664. The Caregiver Resource Network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. The Caregiver Resource Network is facilitated by the Grand Rapids Community College Older Learner Center and Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan, which administer Title IIIIE Older Americans Act National Family Caregiver Support Program.

Please visit our website today and implement your family plan to stay healthy and active- you have much to gain from staying active. Have fun and stay safe!