



CENTER FOR THE
ADVANCEMENT OF HEALTH

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GOODBEHAVIOR!

CENTER FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF HEALTH

MARCH

A New Vision of Aging

The data are compelling, almost overwhelming: If older adults increase physical activity, improve eating habits and take some relatively simple steps to minimize the risk of falling, they could live longer and healthier lives.

But numerous studies also document that older adults often cannot adopt these healthy behaviors, in large part because of systemic barriers. The good news is that there are a variety of non-medical interventions that have proved to be effective in helping older adults make healthier choices, but these interventions are not being applied as systematically or broadly as they could be.

In other words, we know much about how to support older adults in making healthier choices, but we are applying this knowledge in a piecemeal fashion. As a result, just as with our nation's children, too many seniors are being left behind, and the health and financial benefits are not being realized by individuals, families, communities, and the nation as a whole.

Older adults who make healthier choices live longer and better lives. Healthy choices provide four primary benefits.

- Longer life: People who get regular exercise, avoid tobacco use, and eat healthfully have a lower risk of chronic diseases and conditions that often lead to premature death.
- Reduced disability: Healthier choices by older adults lead to reduced rates of disability. People who get regular exercise, avoid tobacco use, and eat healthfully have much lower (50 percent or more) rates of disability than do those who do not.
- Better mental health: Physical activity has been found to help reduce the symptoms of depression. It also can



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ABOUT US

The Center for the Advancement of Health translates to the public the latest research on prevention, chronic disease management and health care, with an emphasis on how social, behavioral and economic factors affect illness and well-being. The Center is an independent nonprofit corporation that receives core funding from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and The Annenberg Foundation.

DISCONNECT

An eight-year study of why Medicare recipients changed health plans found that in equal measure they based their decision on private information - news reports, word-of-mouth, personal experience -- and a publicly disclosed patient-satisfaction report cards. [The National Bureau of Economic Research](#)

help to improve cognitive function and to prevent or delay the onset of mental illness.

- Lower costs: The CDC found that physically active people, on average, have lower health care costs than do inactive people. The same study estimates that increasing moderate physical activity among inactive Americans over the age of 15 could reduce medical costs by as much as \$76.6 billion.

The Center has just published a report documenting that medical care is not necessarily the only or best way to promote health and longevity and identifies a variety of community-based programs that can prevent illness and disability in cost-effective ways once systemic and personal barriers can be overcome.

We need modest public investments that reach neighborhoods, senior centers, YMCAs and local health clubs as well as better coordination among and funding for the myriad federal agencies charged with improving senior health.

Supporting older adults in their efforts to maintain independence, functioning and quality of life is a responsibility that should not be limited by the interest or capacity of health care institutions but should be a common goal of all Americans.

[Economic Research report](#) said, however, "The report-card effect on choice of HMO plan is entirely attributable to beneficiaries' responses to enrollee satisfaction scores (based on such factors as large parking lots and nice waiting rooms). Other reported quality measures, such as the mammography rate, did not affect enrollment."

TOP MEDIA HITS

A Health Behavior News Service story on Cochrane Library review finding that [birth control pills do not cause weight gain](#) resulted in pickup by the *Times of London*, the *Toronto Globe & Mail*, *WebMD*, *FoxNews.com*, *CBSNews.com* and *Prevention magazine*.

FROM THE CENTER

The Center has released its second issues briefing for use by policy makers, practitioners and the public: "A New Vision of Aging: Helping Older Adults Make Healthier Choices." As Jessie Gruman explains in this month's GoodBehavior! essay on the other side, it's time to look at the non-medical aspects of aging - diet, fitness and avoidance of falls - as a way of reducing both the cost and anguish of growing older.

Dr. Gruman was on a panel at the annual meeting of the prestigious American Association for the Advancement of Science in St. Louis. Her presentation on the social and practical costs of medical screening addressed the role of science and the mass media in helping individuals make sense of evidence about how best to take care of themselves and minimize their health risks.

The Bradenton Herald published a letter from Dr. Gruman suggesting that the dietary experiment on 20 people over 12 weeks should not have merited the kind of media attention showered on it by that and many other publications. On the same subject, the Kansas City Star readers' representative quoted Center Vice President Ira Allen about the responsibility of journali

to explain science, not promote diet fad books.

HEALTH AND BEHAVIOR INFORMATION TRANSFER

The National Institutes of Health has announced a new program to provide early research support to promising postdoctoral scientists. NIH will issue between 150 and 200 awards valued almost \$400 million in its first year, starting in the fall of 2006. For more information about the Pathway to Independence Program visit http://grants.nih.gov/grants/new_investigators/index.html

The Society of Behavioral Medicine is holding its annual meeting in San Francisco March 22-24. The theme is "Behavioral Medicine Across the Lifespan," and registration forms are available at <http://www.sbm.org/meeting/2006/registration.cfm>.

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine has published a new background paper on meditation covering its history and use as well as current research. <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/meditation/>.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has announced a new program in which 12 schools and graduate programs of public health will focus on eliminating racial and ethnic disparities. For more information on the Engaged Institutions Initiative, go to <http://www.ccpd.info/>.