



Promoting Healthy Aging in Central Vermont

Vermont: The Healthiest State for Seniors

Seniors living in the Green Mountain State are the healthiest in the country according to the United Health Foundation's America's Health Rankings Senior Report. We have a great culture of wellness and effective systems of support.

In particular, Vermont showed itself to be very strong in the availability of home-delivered meals and SNAP assistance (or "food stamps") for low-income seniors: both of which can be accessed through Central Vermont Council on Aging.

We know that it is important to recognize and celebrate the many ways that Vermonters have the tools, resources and encouragement to keep themselves healthy in their senior years. With a rapidly growing proportion of the population 65 or older, the social structures that work to keep seniors in good health are critical. Central Vermont Council on Aging is an integral part of this network of care for older Vermonters and we are proud to have played a part in these successes.

However, there are areas in which our state can continue to improve life for our elders. For example, Vermont was noted to have particular challenges with alcohol use, lower use of hospice care, and a high rate of falls which can lead to serious injury for seniors.

There are positive signs of improvement in a number of these areas. The use of end-of-life hospice care has increased and there has been a drop in the number of hip fractures requiring hospitalization. The



Wilmer Brandt of Marshfield

state's health department is working hard to expand access to substance abuse programs for older adults.

Despite these gains in senior wellness, national and state funding for seniors – support that helps older adults stay in their homes – continues to decline. Your gift to CVCOA helps to ensure that critical supports for seniors remain available to all those who need it.

Read the findings of the America's Health Rankings report at www.americashealthrankings.org/Senior/VT

Age has given me
what I was looking for
my entire life.

It has given me, me.

- Anne Lamott-



Our Mission

Central Vermont Council on Aging is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that supports elders in leading healthy, independent, meaningful and dignified lives.

CVCOA provides assistance to Vermonters aged 60 years and over, their families and caregivers.

We serve 54 towns throughout the Central Vermont region: Lamoille, Washington, and Orange counties (with the exception of Thetford), as well as the towns of Bethel, Hancock, Granville, Pittsfield, Rochester, Royalton, Sharon and Stockbridge.

We do not charge individuals for the services that we provide to Vermont's senior community.

Our programs and services are supported in part by your generosity.

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From the Director's Desk



Beth Stern
 Executive Director

This winter was particularly challenging for my family. I broke my shoulder while ice skating in Ottawa, my husband injured his thumb while downhill skiing, and our son fell on a rock while cross-country skiing, nearly severing a nerve in his hand.

These accidents all happened within the span of a few weeks and most of the advice we heard was: "stay inside and watch TV."

While we all needed some time to heal, this well-meaning advice was dead wrong.

It is well known that regular exercise is vital to healthy aging. Dr. Calvin H. Hirsch of the UC Davis Medical Center says, "There are volumes of solid evidence that shows that exercise reduces the risk for a litany of serious diseases and conditions. It lowers our risk of breast, colon, and possibly prostate cancer. It improves our physical function and slows decline in general and in specific diseases... It reduces our risk of death from heart disease — and from any cause."

Exercise for seniors (or anyone) does not have to be strenuous or painful. There are many opportunities for all of us to move, stretch and become stronger.

Senior Centers are a great place to begin your search for classes in Bone Builders, tai chi, Living Stronger, Wii bowling, yoga, or other activities. Many gyms offer discounts for seniors or special classes and times for seniors to use the facility.

Many activities can be adapted for those with physical or mental limitations to allow everyone to participate. It isn't really important what you do – just that you do something that is within your own range of possibility.

And how is our family faring?

I immediately began physical therapy and although my shoulder aches when it rains, I have almost normal range of motion and am back swimming. After a month of not being able to open a jar, my husband had surgery on his thumb and can play the piano again. Our son has a nasty scar on his hand from the surgery to replace the damaged nerve but he is spending the summer in Idaho monitoring sage grouse. We are all enjoying summer activities while looking ahead to safely skating and skiing next winter.

This newsletter showcases many health and wellness activities for people of all ages. Enjoy - and thank you for supporting Central Vermont Council on Aging. We can't do our work without you!

Beth Stern

Bone Builders: Facing the Challenge of Osteoporosis

As we grow older, many of us will begin to face the effects of osteoporosis. It is a very common condition in which bone density deteriorates. It is a slow and gradual decline that is a normal part of the aging process.

Osteoporosis weakens bone and makes you more susceptible to fractures. In fact, half of all American women will experience a fracture by the age of 75. Nationwide, it is estimated that osteoporosis is a factor in about 1.5 million fractures every year.

Even more critical, the Mayo Clinic has found that 40,000 deaths each year can be associated with this condition – mostly the result of complications that follow the fracture of weak bones.

To meet this crucial health concern of our elders, the RSVP program recruits and trains a team of volunteers to lead Bone Builders classes in towns throughout the Central Vermont region.

Bone Builders is a strength training & balance exercise program designed to address the weakening of bone. Proper exercise places some stress on our bones. Stimulated by this stress, bone density increases.

The Bone Builders program was developed in light of this basic physical response.

Originally developed at Tufts University as part of the the Strong Living Program, Bone Builders uses balance & weight training exercises to protect

against fractures. When followed diligently, these exercises can help us to increase our bone density and reverse the effects of osteoporosis.

Studies published in the New England Journal of Medicine and the Journal of the American Medical Association show that elderly women, who took

part in a strength training class twice weekly for a year, gained an average of 1% of bone density.

One-hour-long classes

include both standing and sitting exercises and focus on balancing exercises aimed at preventing falls.

Senior participants use hand and ankle weights for resistance training to protect against fractures caused by osteoporosis by increasing muscular strength and bone density.

Classes are fun and a great opportunity to meet other seniors in your community! Please call the Senior HelpLine at (800) 642-5119 to find a class near you!



After a recent illness, my physical therapist checked the strength of my upper and lower body. She was impressed of how strong I still was at 76.

I know this is partly thanks to the Bone Builder classes I'm taking!

- Renate Socinski, Hyde Park



Tai Chi for Health

With the many advancements in accessibility and health care, we may feel that we have everything that we need in order to remain healthy and independent as we grow older. However, the ancient art of tai chi can help to bring many benefits to its practitioners.

Originating in China, tai chi is a martial art that can be an effective exercise to promote the overall health of mind and body.

Although its deep skills and knowledge can be studied by masters for many years, tai chi's basic forms are easy to learn, bringing health benefits even for new practitioners.

It may seem strange to consider that a martial art – even a gentle and focused one such as tai chi – could help reduce falls and address a range of health challenges. That said, the fundamental approach of the practice is no different than the basic concepts that we already know to promote good health.

The essential principles of tai chi center on the integration of mind and body. In learning tai chi, you cultivate the mental attributes of concentration and clarity of mind while developing the physical skills of agility, balance, and control of how the body moves.

One of the most popular tai chi programs for elders was developed by Dr. Paul Lam, a medical doctor who lives in Australia.

He began studying tai chi while at medical school because he suffered from arthritis. Finding that his practice helped his condition, he began to create simple and accessible Tai Chi for Health programs.

Since then, studies looking at the effectiveness of these programs have found that they can help to improve one's health. This research has shown that tai chi works to improve both muscular strength and flexibility.



Strong muscles are important for supporting and protecting joints and are essential for our normal physical movement. Flexibility exercises improve one's range of motion, enabling people to move easier and help to promote effective circulation.

Tai chi movements emphasize good posture and the importance of weight transference, both of which help your balance, preventing falls and any injuries

that might result.

Today, many health organizations around the world, such as the Centers for Disease Control and the Arthritis Foundation, support various tai chi programs.

CVCOA's Ellie Hayes has studied tai chi for more than 40 years and has been teaching Tai Chi for Health to area seniors since 2011. Modest-sized classes offer ample opportunity for individualized instruction. She and other teachers are happy to introduce you to this graceful art from that's also very good for you!



Photo by dolfindans / CC BY 2.0

To find a tai chi class in your community, ask your local senior center or call the Senior HelpLine at (800) 642-5119.

Around the world, tai chi is often practiced as a group, leading to both personal and social well-being!

The Senior Nutrition Program: More Than Just A Meal!

CVCOA's nutrition program is one of our primary activities that contributes directly to the ongoing health and well-being of seniors throughout Central Vermont. The program has two parts: Meal on Wheels and community meals at senior centers throughout the region.

We work with 14 different meal sites throughout our service area to prepare and serve hot meals for seniors. Due to an aging population and rising food insecurity, we are witnessing an unprecedented demand for nutritional support. This year, we are planning to help provide more than 200,000 meals – about 10,000 more than we served last year!

All of the meals prepared with CVCOA's support are reviewed by a registered dietician to ensure that they provide the elders with the nutrition needed for good health. Many volunteers who deliver meals to elders' homes receive their training through our RSVP program as well!

Though anyone can come to a meal site to enjoy a hot lunch and good conversation, the Meals on Wheels program provides nutritious meals to older adults who are unable to prepare meals on their own or attend community meals. As a result, the seniors who receive home-delivered meals tend to be more vulnerable to food insecurity than other Vermonters.

Thanks to the efforts of so many people, those receiving Meals on Wheels are better able to remain independent and in their homes.



In a recent survey, 98% of these seniors report having enough to eat every day and 90% report feeling better. Over 70% have said that this nutritional support has enabled them to remain living in their homes.



While these results show the program's great benefit for our elders' health, that's not all they do!

It can be very lonely for seniors who are living independently. The brief visit from the volunteers who bring meals to the door often turns into both a friendly visit and a chance to check on the elders' well-being.

These visits help to improve both anxiety and feelings of isolation and loneliness. They provide seniors and their families with peace of mind and an increased feeling of safety.

Similarly, community meals at senior centers provide a wonderful opportunity for social activity in addition to the basic nutritional benefits of the food served. When they go to have a meal, they meet other seniors and can create new friendships. Congregate meals can help build strong and happy social lives for seniors that wish to keep living by themselves.

CVCOA's senior nutrition program is an effective way of caring for our seniors in both body and mind!

Learn more about how good nutrition helps older Vermonters at www.cvcoa.org/2014_mow_survey



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*CVCOA: Working hard
for your good health!*

Empowering Seniors & Caregivers • Senior HelpLine 1-800-642-5119



Honoring our Volunteers:

Our thanks go out to all those who generously give their time to support the health, dignity and worth of senior Vermonters.

Ready to join them?
Write us at volunteer@cvcoa.org



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