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Wednesday, March 25, 2009

Secret to aging well is exercise and diet

Kimberly Hayes Taylor / The Detroit News

Gray hair is popping out like dandelions. You can't seem to remember anyone's telephone number without looking in your cell phone address book. Your memory lapses come so unexpectedly. Just when you're about to introduce someone you've known for years at a party, their name suddenly leaves your brain.

These are signs your brain is getting older, aging experts say, and it will only get worse with time. But if you get actively involved with staying younger longer, you can improve the process.

"You have to engage in aging," says Peter Lichtenberg, director of Wayne State University's Institute of Gerontology in Detroit and a psychology professor. "It can't be a passive process; it has to be an active one.

Advertisement "You have to be willing to focus on improving your memory and problem-solving capabilities, make sure your diet is appropriate and get physical exercise."

Since before explorer Juan Ponce de Leon searched for the Fountain of Youth in 1508, people have yearned for something to keep them forever young. The latest trends for staying younger and keeping a nimble mind -- eating a well-balanced diet filled with fresh fruits and vegetables, loading up on antioxidants, including spices, and getting lots of exercise and sunshine -- will be discussed Thursday during the 10th annual conference on the Art of Aging Successfully: Revitalize, Rejuvenate, Refresh.

The event, sponsored by the Wayne State University Institute of Gerontology in partnership with several other Metro Detroit agencies focusing on aging, will be presented at Greater Grace Conference Center in Detroit. Detroit Medical Center executive and storyteller Mildred Matlock will be keynote speaker with Chronologically Gifted: The Best is Yet to Come. The event also features workshops on holistic therapies, tai chi classes and storytelling. The program includes discovering genealogy and staying active by volunteering.

Those are fine activities for staying active and involved, but instead of doing crossword puzzles and Sudoku to keep your brain active, exercise is a better recipe, says aging expert Sue Halpern.

"It's not the most interesting thing in the world and it doesn't make a lot of sense, but when you exercise, your body is producing new neurons in your brain," says Halpern, author of "Can't Remember What I Forgot: The Good News from the Front Lines of Memory Research" (Harmony Books, \$24). "When you get older, the body produces fewer neurons. When you exercise, you get the opportunity to jump start neurons in your brain."

What does exercise have to do with your brain? Clinical research shows dementia appears to be caused by elevated levels of blood glucose, and some researchers are saying Alzheimer's may be a form of diabetes. When you exercise, you bring down the level of glucose in your blood.

"So there really are good reasons for exercise," Halpern says. "I don't mean you have to go out and run a marathon; just go out and walk for a half hour or 40 minutes a day. That's all it really takes."

Dr. Eric R. Braverman puts it this way: "Aging is you burn up, dry up, swell up and turn to stone. You need to work at it to avoid that."

Braverman, a New York City-based internal medicine physician and author of "Younger (Thinner) You Diet: How Understanding Your Brain Chemistry Can Help You Lose Weight, Reverse Aging, and Fight Disease" (Rodale, \$25.95), says no one can get enough exercise.

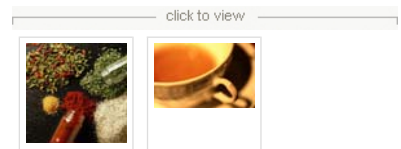
He recommends an hour of dumbbells on Tuesdays and Thursdays; 30 minutes on the treadmill or do an 8-minute run at an incline on the treadmill at a 4.5 speed setting on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; a swim on Saturday; and rest on Sunday.

He also recommends a diet loaded with fresh produce, antioxidants, herbal teas and at least 7 teaspoons of spices such as cinnamon, fennel, rosemary and turmeric.

"The brain is the most important organ in the body, and you're always eating for that," he says. "You can never get enough nutrients. You can never exercise enough or get enough fresh air. Our society is toxic; zinc and antioxidants are the anecdotes for toxins."



click to enlarge
 Certain spices help with weight loss and battle cancer. (PhotoDisc)



More information

If you go

Art of Aging Successfully: Revitalize, Rejuvenate, Refresh
 8:30 a.m.-1:45 p.m. Thursday
 Greater Grace Conference Center
 23500 W. Seven Mile, Detroit
 Cost is \$18 for those 55 and older; \$25 or more for Golden Circle, which helps others attend the event; \$50 for service providers and includes lunch.
 To register, call Donna MacDonald at (313) 577-2297.

Drink tea for longevity

Studies show that green tea increases metabolism, decreases appetite and provides energy for exercise. Drinking tea also helps lower risk of cancer, lower risk of heart disease, detoxify the liver and improve glucose tolerance, preventing diabetes. Tea also has been shown to stimulate digestion, reduce inflammation, lower cholesterol and help reverse aging and with weight loss. "Younger (Thinner) You Diet: How Understanding Your Brain Chemistry Can Help You Lose Weight, Reverse Aging, and Fight Disease" author Dr. Eric R. Braverman, also author of the New York Times bestseller "Younger You," recommends drinking tea throughout the day, including with each meal:
Breakfast: Within two hours of waking, drink green tea after breakfast.
Mid-morning: Keep energy going with a cup of flavored black tea.
Lunch: Follow this meal with a strong cup of oolong tea.
Midday: Improve digestion with a cup of peppermint tea.
Dinner: No later than three hours before bedtime,

Halpern says you can't start and stop. Eating right and working should become life-long habits to avoid typical age-related ailments.

"Do this for your whole life, and you will have the benefits of this for a very long time," she says. "You will be less inclined to get heart disease, high blood pressure and standard Type II diabetes. The earlier you start this, the better off you are."

You can reach Kimberly Hayes Taylor at (313) 222-2058 or ktaylor@detnews.com.

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drink a weaker cup of oolong or chamomile tea. **Before bed:** Drink a cup of white tea to help you relax before bedtime.

Go spicy, get healthy

Did you know that many spices are antioxidants, those substances known for battling cancer? They also can help with weight loss by boosting your metabolism. Author and internal medicine physician Dr. Eric R. Braverman also recommends that we incorporate at least seven total teaspoons of the spices below into our diets each day: Allspice, ancho chili, basil, bay leaves, black pepper, caraway seed, cardamom, celery seed, chervil, chipotle chili, chives, cilantro, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, cumin, dill, fennel, ginger, mace, marjoram, mint, mustard, nutmeg, oregano, paprika, parsley, poppy seed, red pepper, rosemary, saffron, sage, savory, sesame seed, tarragon, turmeric, vanilla, white pepper

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