



Master the Art of Living

Elim Park Place Newsletter
Volume 13 Issue 2 February 2017

Barbara Womer, Wellness Director

The Heart-Brain Connection

Most people know that the heart is constantly responding to neural signals from the brain, but most don't know that the heart actually sends more signals to the brain than vice versa! These heart signals have a significant effect on the brain, influencing emotional processing as well as attention, perception, memory, and problem-solving. The heart-brain connection is a two-way street!

The heart was once thought to operate like a metronome, regularly beating a steady rhythm when at rest. Research has shown that the rhythm of a healthy heart is surprisingly irregular. The variation in heart beats is called heart rate variability (HRV). Scientists and physicians now consider HRV to be an important indicator of health and fitness because it reflects our ability to adapt to stress and environmental demands.

HRV is also an indicator of biological aging. It is greatest when we are young and gets smaller as we age. Having an abnormally low HRV is associated with increased risk of future health problems and is observed in people with a wide range of diseases and disorders.

One of the most compelling factors that affect our heart's changing rhythm is our feelings and emotions. Emotional stress such as anger, frustration, and anxiety, gives rise to heart rhythm patterns that appear irregular. Stressful emotions can cause our body to operate inefficiently, drain our energy, and cause additional wear and tear on our whole system.

Positive emotions feel good and actually smooth out HRV. Appreciation, joy, care, and love actually help our body synchronize and work better. In fact, research shows that sustained positive emotions elicit a body-wide shift termed psychophysiological coherence. It is characterized by increased harmony in our mental and emotional (psychological) and bodily (physiological) processes. Psychophysiological coherence is a state of optimal function in which the body and brain work, feel, and perform better.

Research has shown that the heart is an important component of the emotional system. *See Heart on pg. 2*

Happy Valentine's Day



Random Acts of Kindness

Random Acts of Kindness (RAK) week is February 12th – 18th. Be a RAKtivist™ and commit an act of kindness. It will improve mental and physical health, reduce stress, and give you better life satisfaction. An act of kindness can be as simple as letting someone get in front of you in line or it can be more elaborate like treating for coffee or lunch.

Wellness and Life Enrichment will hold a carnation sale to provide residents with an opportunity to be kind to someone. Carnations will be sold at the Concierge Desk on Wednesday, February 15th from 11:00am – 1:00pm for \$1. Orders will not be taken and there will be a limited supply.

National Wear Red Day

Friday, Feb. 3rd is National Wear Red Day, a day to raise awareness of women's heart disease. Heart disease and stroke are the number one killer of women, but 80% of cardiac and stroke events are preventable with education and action. Show your support and wear red this day!

Enjoy Massage

Janine Delinger L.M.T. will provide free 10-minute massages in the Fitness Center on February 10th from 12:30pm – 2:30pm. Space is limited. Sign up at the Concierge Desk beginning February 1st.

Tree of Knowledge & Wishing Well

Continuing to use your skills, talents and abilities is an important part of aging successfully. Elim Park residents have indicated they do not feel they have opportunities to use their skills, talents and abilities or do not have opportunities to learn new ones. We have responded to this by asking residents to let us know what skills they have that they would be willing to share (leaf on the Tree of Knowledge) and/or what they would like to learn (coin in the Wishing Well). We encourage you to participate by visiting the Fitness Center and adding to the Tree and Well. Call the Wellness Dept. for details.

Dr. Rob's Science Connection
Enhancing Brain Health. Is Dementia on the Rise? Maybe Not.

While it is true that the overall number of dementia cases will increase in the United States and elsewhere in the coming years, that isn't the whole story. The headline you don't often see is that the proportion of older adults with dementia is actually decreasing. We need to define a couple of terms epidemiologists, people who study disease and health in populations, use to describe health trends in the population.

1. Prevalence – *proportion of the population with a particular condition*
2. Incidence – *the number of cases in a given time period*

While it is true that the incidence or the number of new cases of dementia is increasing, it is because we now have more older adults and people are living longer. For example, in the past decade the number of people with dementia in the United States has increased by over 1 million, and that sounds kind of scary. But the prevalence or the proportion of the population in the United States and Western Europe has actually decreased! A 2013 study published in the journal *Lancet* reported that the percentage of people 65 and older with dementia has plummeted 25% in the past 20 years from 8.3% to 6.2%. Similar results have been measured in the United States.

Why is the prevalence or proportion of people with dementia gone down so much? We don't know for sure but it could be a combination of lifestyle changes and medical advances such as controlling cardiovascular risk factors, cholesterol screening and drugs, and controlled blood pressure. It may also be due to better education, possibly more cognitive stimulation, greater awareness of the importance of physical exercise and good nutrition, intake of omega 3 fatty acids, and diet.

It appears that the increased awareness of how lifestyle affects our health might already be affecting dementia rates, but we still have a long way to go. We could further reduce dementia and delay the onset of it by doing the things that we know can maximize memory ability. We haven't discovered a magic drug to prevent dementia yet, but we are making progress finding some of the controllable factors that matter.

Dr. Rob Winningham is a Professor of Psychology and Gerontology at Western Oregon University. For the past 20 years he has researched human memory and ways to enhance cognitive abilities. His brain stimulation activities are used by thousands of retirement communities and have been shown to improve memory ability.

*Elim Park continues to provide residents with many opportunities to increase brain health and awareness. Hopefully many of you were able to attend Dr. Cooper's presentation in January and had some questions answered. We also offer ongoing fitness and cognition classes. We encourage you to take an active role in your health. Remember 70% of how you age is determined by the lifestyle choices you make!

Sharpen Your Brain with Sudoku!

2		5			7			6
4			9	6			2	
				8			4	5
9	8			7	4			
5	7		8		2		6	9
			6	3			5	7
7	5			2				
	6			5	1			2
3			4			5		8

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Heart continued

The heart not only responds to emotion, its rhythmic beating plays a large part in determining the quality of an emotional experience. Heart signals impact perception and cognitive function due to the communication network with the brain. The heart also appears to play a key role in intuition.

Scientists have discovered that the heart has its own intrinsic nervous system containing over 40,000 neurons. This "heart brain" allows the heart to independently process information, make decisions, and demonstrate a type of learning and memory. The heart also secretes hormones and neurotransmitters that affect brain function. It produces oxytocin, known as the "love" or "bonding" hormone. Love actually can be felt by the heart. ♥