

## **Senior Care Corner Podcast Transcript**

### **Vital Heart Health Tips for Seniors (and Their Loved Ones)**

**Barry:** Welcome to Senior Care Corner. I'm Barry

**Kathy:** and I'm Kathy. Thanks for joining us.

**Barry:** You'll find us online at SeniorCareCorner.com with solutions, tools, and information for families, caregivers, and others who care for and about senior adults. Well Kathy today we got another timely episode lined up since we're getting ready to enter Heart Month. We thought we'd talk about heart and heart disease and the impact on not only our senior loved ones but us.

But before we get to that, Kathy you've got some news?

**Kathy:** I do. Our first news item today a "Study of the Day". Computer aided exercise is better for seniors. A new study is reporting that compared to regular exercise, improved cognition gains can be achieved along with physical fitness, using virtual reality exercises for seniors or Exergames.

We know that regular physical activity will give results for seniors but unfortunately, it's reported that only 14% of seniors aged 65 to 74 years and only 7% of those over 75 reported any regular exercise.

Can exergames (defined as the activity of playing video games that involve physical exertion and are thought of as a form of exercise) using a stationary bike. Will that encourage seniors to participate more often?

Well, scientists at the Union College Healthy Aging and Neuropsychology Lab followed 101 elders aged 58-99 years, monitoring their activity 3 times a week for 3 months. They rode bikes equipped with cyber cycle display using 3D tours, racing options and avatars representing themselves. Their executive functions (those cognitive skills of memory, reasoning, attention and planning) were measured before, one month later, and then three months later. Their blood was also tested for neurotropic growth factors that can indicate brain neuroplasticity.

The cyber cycle riders group showed no difference in exercise frequency or intensity but had a significantly better executive function than those who used plain stationary bikes without the exergame. They also had a 23% reduction in a progression toward dementia compared to the control group.

The result demonstrates that seniors who can participate in exergaming can get the rewards both physically and mentally for those who don't play.

**Barry:** Wow, so we've learned before that certain video games can be good for your brain; now video games can be good for your body. I guess video games are no longer the sole domain of the younger ones are they?

**Kathy:** That's right. And can be effective. Our next news item is Six Ways to Feel Happier and Be Healthier. How we feel not only affects us in the moment, but also for years to come.

Two recent studies delve into the affect our mood has on our physical health.

One study suggests that a positive attitude can protect us against poor health later and may be an antidote to stress, pain and illness.

Another study found that happy people tend to live longer. We know that if we eat right, get enough physical activity and stop smoking we can improve our health but how do we change our attitude?

Here are 6 suggestions for your senior to be happier:

1. Adopt an Animal to keep you company: pets give more than companionship. Studies show that pet owners feel closer to their pets than they do to their own family members. Pets listen attentively and love unconditionally. 97% of pet owners report that they talk to their pets and it is said the other 3% lied. Having a pet is calming for most seniors. If your senior doesn't want to care for a pet themselves, perhaps they can volunteer at an animal shelter or zoo, walk someone's dog or try a having a bird, which is a little bit easier to take care of.
2. Turn up the music: soothing, familiar sounds can reduce stress and provide comfort. It can help your senior fall asleep. It also triggers memory, reduces anxiety and agitation and can promote healing by reducing stress hormones.
3. Have a good laugh: a strong belly laugh can dull pain and boost energy. It can allow blood vessels to open and that's good for your heart. Your senior needs to laugh every day.
4. Get back to nature: going outside can boost your senior's mood. It can decrease his stress, depression and tension. Natural settings stimulate the mind. Being outdoors can help seniors concentrate, improve their memory and just restore them. Of course getting more physically active helps also by walking, gardening, fishing, or cycling.
5. Help yourself by helping others: if your senior volunteers in the community or with friends, relatives or neighbors they report more happiness than those who don't. We know staying engaged with the community keeps our minds sharp too. Volunteers report greater life satisfaction.

6. Try tai chi: this activity reduces anxiety and depression, lowers blood pressure and can relieve chronic pain. It helps seniors focus on their breathing, body and mind.

**Barry:** Ah, interesting set of recommendations.

**Kathy:** Yea it's a good overall view. Alright, our next news item: Alzheimer's Common in the Oldest Old Women. According to a new report, more than 40% of older women 85 years and over showed symptoms of Alzheimer's disease and other memory problems. The fastest growing segment of the population in the US right now is this "oldest old" age group.

The report urges that screening for cognitive disorders in the oldest old population is vital.

Researchers from the University of California at San Francisco studied about 1,300 women ages 85 and greater as part of the Women's Cognitive Impairment Study of Exceptional Aging in states across the country. 20% were over 90 years. 41% of this group had serious cognitive deficits in memory and thinking, the remainder tested normally. Those in the impaired group suffered from Alzheimer's dementia, vascular dementia or mild cognitive impairment leading to Alzheimer's. A history of stroke, depression or limited schooling increased the risk.

It appears that the incidence of Alzheimer's and other types of dementia almost doubles with every 5 years of age after 65.

Researchers believe this information will be valuable as the population ages in order to direct public health planning efforts.

Alright our final story, how often do older women need bone scans? As we get older, women worry about the possibility of osteoporosis.

How often should we get a bone density test to check out our bone strength?

After your first bone scan, if there are no problems with that one, research has shown you can safely wait 15 years according to a recent study by Dr. Heidi Nelson at the Oregon Health & Science University, an expert in this particular field. Despite the recommendations by health professionals for women to get bone scans, no one really knows how often they should be done.

Bone mineral scans done via X-ray takes only about 10 minutes using a low dose radiation (less radiation than you'd get from a chest x-ray) and cost about \$250. Medicare currently pays for these tests every two years.

A bone scan measures the thickness of bones in certain places to determine your risk of osteoporosis which is a bone thinning disease. If the test finds your senior has thinning bones, usually the treatment to prevent bone loss and rebuild strength by using a better diet, more exercise and bone building drugs.

The current recommendation is that all women over 65 years get a bone scan as well as younger postmenopausal women who may be at risk.

This study followed 5,000 women for 15 years. Those with healthy initial scans did fine for 15 years, those with a moderate test required a follow-up scan in 5 years and women at high risk should get tested more often, maybe as much as annually. These results indicate that many women may be tested too frequently.

They also say your senior's plan should also include a discussion with your doctor. Most women fail to get their initial screening. As women age, their risk increases and a more frequent test may be warranted if other risk factors are present such as a slim build, smoking, prior broken bones, and medications that can erode your bones.

**Barry:** Well that's a topic we certainly don't hear enough about. Thanks Kathy.

**Kathy:** You're welcome.

**Barry:** Well that's the news for today and it's time for our feature segment. Every year in February the Heart Association gets us to really think more about heart disease by declaring it "Heart Month"; which of course makes sense given that Valentine's Day falls in February.

But we wanted to really talk about it because heart health is really important not just for our senior loved ones but for ourselves and our family members as well.

Heart disease strikes so many people that it's important that we know as much as possible to protect ourselves and of course our senior loved ones. Whether you call it coronary heart disease, coronary artery disease, cardiovascular heart disease, arteriosclerosis, or heart damage; it can be a live changing event for families; and unfortunately life changing not in a good way.

First we want to tell you some facts about heart disease and stroke. About every 25 seconds, an American will have a coronary event. And about every minute, someone will die from one.

Each year more than 500,000 die from heart disease. That's a staggering number.

**Kathy:** The statistics are frightening. Well Barry, heart disease is the number one killer in women. 50% of men and 64% of women who die suddenly of heart disease have had NO PREVIOUS symptoms.

In 2011, heart disease cost the United States of \$400 billion. This total includes not only the cost of healthcare services but includes medications and lost productivity from work.

On average, people at low risk for heart disease live nearly 10 years long than those at high risk.

**Barry:** Even if you're in your 70s or 80s, a healthy life style can lower your risk of dying from heart disease.

A recent study shows that among people ages 70-90, leading a healthy life style reduces the chances of dying from heart disease by nearly 2/3!

Often high blood pressure has no signs or symptoms; having diabetes doubles your risk for heart disease. About 47% of sudden cardiac deaths occur outside a hospital.

**Kathy:** Which is very shocking because that means that it's happening at home and we need to be ready.

So here are some risk factors for heart disease (which is a waxy buildup of plaque that leads to heart attack and stroke) that your senior can control; some factors you can't control but these are the ones that you can: high blood cholesterol or triglyceride levels, high blood pressure, diabetes and pre-diabetes (a new area we're just getting into studying), overweight and obesity, smoking, lack of physical activity, poor eating habits, and stress.

**Barry:** Boy Kathy you're talking about a lot of things that have been in the news that's really affecting Americans more and more as well.

But the more risk factors you or your senior loved one have, the greater the risk of heart disease, heart attack, and stroke. Certainly there are risk factors that we can't control such as age, our family history, and our gender. Focus on the risk factors that your senior can work on to make positive changes in his or her life.

There are a number of ways our seniors, and of course us, but certainly our seniors can reduce this risk factor. The first is tackling high cholesterol and high triglyceride levels; you need to know your numbers! Do you know what they are? Is it a particularly high level? Do you know which of your blood lipid numbers needs improvement? It's easier to tailor your treatment to that particular number. Do you need to watch the cholesterol in your diet or do you also need to lower your triglycerides? Is your good cholesterol good or bad? Your doctor can help you determine which numbers need work and how best to target your approach for improvement.

Following a heart healthy diet can these numbers in control. You may need medications in addition to a healthy diet to lower your numbers though. Again, talk to your doctor.

How to control your blood pressure? Well first of all, you need to know what it is. Have your blood pressure checked at least once a year. All levels above 120/80 raise your risk of heart disease. Take your blood pressure medication as prescribed if you have one. Many seniors don't take their medication as prescribed. Some choose not to fill their prescriptions. Make sure your loved ones do that!

Monitor your blood pressure according to your doctor's advice. Limit the salt you use. Just cutting out the salt shaker on the table, reading food label to buy lower salt products and limiting high salt foods as much as possible can really make a difference in your blood pressure.

**Kathy:** That's true Barry. And our third suggestion is combating diabetes and pre-diabetes. Have your blood sugar checked regularly. You need to know if you're in that pre-diabetes range. Many people who have diabetes are undiagnosed and damage to their blood vessels is occurring right now. If you have diabetes, follow your healthcare team's guidelines for managing your blood sugar. Remember there's a direct link to diabetes and heart disease; so controlling your blood sugar combined with a heart healthy diet will improve your risk.

If you have pre-diabetes, learn all you can to prevent becoming diabetic. Again, it's important to do everything you can to control the life style factors that are increasing your risk for diabetes and heart disease.

**Barry:** Our fourth item is really a set of tips to manage your weight. Americans are facing an epidemic of obesity. We hear about it all the time and we often think of it happening to other people. You can check your risk for obesity by calculating your BMI. We'll give you a link to a calculator and you can see where you fall in the show notes today. Your **Body Mass Index** is important.

Control your portion sizes. Can't say this often enough! Use a smaller plate to help you achieve that goal. And certainly, don't take seconds. Limit between meal snacking which can easily get out of hand, especially when we're sitting there watching TV or we're not focusing on what we're eating.

Limit sugary drinks that add calories without nutrition. And most of all, of course, get physically active.

**Kathy:** That's so true. We all need this advice. Our fifth suggestion is stop smoking, if you do! Find a cessation class to help you overcome this habit. There are a variety of treatment options that have been very effective and your doctor can recommend one of these for you.

**Barry:** The next is the key to physical activity. Get moving! Walking is the first step to becoming active. If you have limited mobility, do as much as you can and seek ways to increase your physical movement. If they do have limited mobility, find a way they can move.

Specific exercises, and as Kathy mentioned before, exergaming can be done if mobility is impaired. If you live near a facility that offers water aerobics, this is a great activity for seniors. Or even if you have a community pool, get out there and move in the pool where it doesn't take as much to get you really going because of the resistance water provides.

Also be sure to get medical advice before starting regular physical activity. Just to be safe.

**Kathy:** That's a good hint. Combating a poor diet. Check out your plate! Are you eating the way you know you should? We all seem to know what's good to eat and what's not good to eat, but we have a very difficult time fighting temptation. Do you have sound nutritional choices at

every meal? One change in each meal can really improve your health. Are you eating fruits and vegetables every day? Is your protein lean or high fat? Are you avoiding fried foods?

You don't have to go over budget to eat healthy. We'll talk later about what makes up a heart healthy diet.

**Barry:** And the last of our items here is limiting your stress. There's no easy answer to stress. Everyone experiences stress. Now I often hear people talk about being in a stressful situation at work makes them perform better. Well, that may be one thing for work, but it's just the opposite on your body.

But it's also how you handle the stress you have that matters. Don't sweat the small stuff, as they say. Control what you can and don't worry so much about the things that aren't in your control. Careful planning will help you be ready for emergencies and reduce the stress that they bring.

Also find someone that you trust to share your feelings and help reduce the stress you're actually carrying.

**Kathy:** Alright, those are all good ideas to help reduce the risk factors that are in our control. One important thing to do to combat heart disease is following a heart healthy diet. So what's included in a heart healthy diet? We're going to a series of items that will help you modify your diet and make that one good change at every meal.

So a heart healthy diet is one that would be low in saturated fat and trans fat. All fats are listed on the labels now, you can read exactly how much and what kinds of fat are in your food. Saturated fats are found in meats, dairy products, chocolate, baked goods and deep fried and processed foods.

Trans fats are found in some fried and processed foods. The trans fats are what we really want to try to eliminate totally from our diet.

Both types of fat raise your bad cholesterol.

**Barry:** A heart healthy diet is also high in the types of fat found in fish and olive oil. You need to get more of that if you can. These fats are rich in omega 3 fatty acids. Omega 3 fatty acids lower your risk of heart attack in part by helping prevent blood clots.

A healthy diet is also high in fiber. Fiber is found in High in fiber. Fiber is found in whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. A fiber-rich diet not only helps lower your LDL cholesterol level but also provides nutrients that may help protect against Coronary Heart Disease. Half of your grains should be whole wheat each day.

**Kathy:** And remember that LDL cholesterol is the lousy one that's the one you don't want.

**Barry:** I like that L is Lousy.

**Kathy:** Right! And HDL is the healthy we want to have a HDL that's Healthy.

Alright, our next tip for a healthy diet is one that would be low in salt and sugar. It's very important to keep a diet that's low-salt. It can help you manage your blood pressure. Eliminate the salt shaker and prepare foods without using salt. A low-sugar diet can help you prevent weight gain and control your diabetes and pre-diabetes conditions. One easy way to do that is to limit sugary drinks.

It's very important that everyone take a good hard look at reading food labels. They can help your senior select, and us too, the most appropriate foods to maintain our heart health no matter what we're looking at sodium, fats, trans fats, sugars.

**Barry:** Remember one way we said to manage your stress is to plan what you're going to do when an emergency. Well we want to talk to you about some things that caregivers could do to be prepared in an emergency.

1. Learn CPR including how to use an AED (automatic external defibrillator). You may see signs for these all around buildings now as many buildings have required to put them in. When you see that sign that said AED, that's the name to which it's referring.

Caregivers should learn CPR-find and accredited class near you by checking with the local Red Cross or a nearby hospital.

In the event that your loved one's heart stops, CPR will pump oxygenated blood to the brain and body until further medical treatment can be given.

2. That's true, it's so very important that we learn CPR. Not just for our seniors and ourselves but for our children and our grandchildren. Alright the second thing that we really need to learn about and know how to handle in an emergency is what happens in the event of a stroke?
3. It's important that we learn the warning signs of a STROKE

Act FAST and call 911:

**F stands for**-face: ask the person to smile, does one side of their face droop?

**A stands for**-arm: ask the person to raise both arms at their sides, does one arm drift downward?

**S is**-speech: ask the person to repeat a simple phrase, is their speech clear or is it slurred?

**T stands for**-time: if you see any of these signs, call 9 1 1 immediately, and note the time the first symptoms appeared.

If someone is having a stroke the time is very important. Once a stroke begins within three hours of the first symptom, there is an FDA-approved clot-buster medication that may reduce long-term disability for the most common type of stroke so the faster you act the better chance of their recovery.

Some symptoms you may want to be alert to:

SUDDEN numbness or weakness of face, arm or leg - especially on one side; this is sudden onset not the dragging pain that they've had for a long time but sudden changes; confusion, trouble speaking or understanding; trouble seeing in one or both of their eyes; trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination and severe headache with no known cause.

**Barry:** The American Heart Association promotes awareness in everyone but especially in women, because heart disease hits women even harder than men. But they promote this awareness with their Go Red for Women campaign. February 3 is National Wear Red Day and we encourage everyone to participate to increase awareness of this deadly disease and to promote activities that really help improve heart health. We will include a link in our show notes for you to get your free Go Red pin.

Because heart disease is the leading cause of death and disability in the United States, we really feel it is important to continue to learn what we can all do to prevent it, treat it and act in emergencies.

The chance of developing coronary heart disease can be reduced by taking steps to prevent and control factors that put people at greater risk. In addition, knowing the signs and symptoms of heart attack are crucial to the most positive outcomes after a loved one has a heart attack. Or even after we do, often we need to spot those symptoms in ourselves and make sure we get the help we need instead of just ignoring them.

We hope we have given you information that you and your senior loved ones will be able to use to stay healthy for a long, long time.

**Kathy:** Well Barry, I think that's a lot of great information and advice. I hope caregivers find it very useful.

**Barry:** Yeah, I think we need to keep reminding people of this. And I think the Heart Association does a great job. And that February Heart Month, while it's just one month out of the year, at least it does bring it to the foreground for a month.

That's our feature segment today. Kathy, you want to wrap us up with a quick tip?

**Kathy:** I sure do, today's quick tip is: While it is true that the best way to get all the vitamins and minerals and good nutrition that we need is from our food, but oftentimes for people over 50 it can be difficult to eat enough food to get all the nutrients that they need.

1. Read the labels to see how much to take so that your senior doesn't take too much! And I'm talking about the labels on the vitamin bottle. The more the better is not true for supplements as you can overdose on certain nutrients.
2. Be sure you are buying from a reputable source; remember that dietary supplements are largely unregulated. Some untrustworthy sources of vitamins and minerals may not be what they say they are.
3. Discuss with your doctor, pharmacist or dietitian before taking any new supplements because many interfere with your prescription medications.

We will put a link in our show notes for a complete list of vitamins and minerals that seniors should be getting, how much, why and what foods to include every day.

**Barry:** Thanks Kathy that is a great reminder that we need on a regular basis. Well that's the Senior Care Corner podcast for today folks. We hope you've enjoyed it and found it very informative. Again, please stop by to see us at [SeniorCareCorner.com](http://SeniorCareCorner.com) or at Senior Care Corner on Facebook. We hope you'll stop in and take a look at what we've got and leave us your thoughts there. Either a comment to our post here or leave us some thoughts on our wall on Facebook. But we appreciate you joining us and until next time; we hope everyone has a great day.