



Department of Health
140 County Highway 33W
Suite 3
Cooperstown, NY 13326
Phone: (607) 547-6483
Fax: (607) 547-4385

NEWS RELEASE

September is Healthy Aging Month

As you're reading this, you are getting older. We all do it, but some of us feel older than we are due to a lack of physical activity and good nutrition. September is Healthy Aging Month, a time to focus on what we can do to be the healthiest we can be at any age.

The first step to aging well, said Diane Cusworth Director of the Otsego County Department of Health, is to understand and accept that aging is a normal, lifelong process with gifts and challenges at every age. For many people, their middle or senior years bring with them social, mental and emotional strength along with changes in physical abilities and health.

"Those who age well, or gracefully are those who try to adapt to change and always be in their best possible health," Diane Cusworth said.

As we grow older, it's easier to gain weight and lose muscle strength, tone and flexibility. Aging can also cause frailty, loss of appetite and even depression. But we can reduce the impact by staying physically active, eating well, getting regular checkups and choosing not to smoke or abuse alcohol. "People who stay active not only help protect themselves from age-related problems, but they also have a greater sense of well-being," Diane Cusworth said. "Physical activity helps the body stay strong and maintain, repair and improve itself. Daily activity helps us to maintain a healthy heart and lungs as well as a healthy metabolism to control weight," she said.

The New York State Department of Health recommends at least 30 minutes of physical activity every day. You may find it fun to be active by creating your own activity or by participating in some of these: dancing, gardening, walking, bird-watching, swimming, boating (canoeing, kayaking, rowing), ice skating, skiing, sledding, hiking, bicycling, bowling, yoga, Pilates, stretching, aerobics or organized sports such as badminton, tennis or volleyball.

"You don't have to do all 30 minutes at one time. Three 10-minute walks can be just as beneficial as one 30-minute walk," Diane Cusworth said.

If you enjoy being active with a partner or a group, call your local YMCA, senior center, or office for the aging and ask about physical activity programs.

The State Health Department urges older adults to eat at least two cups of vegetables and one and one-half cups of fruit every day. These foods provide vitamins, minerals and fiber, and also help reduce risk of heart disease and cancer, while helping maintain healthy weight. Low-fat and fat-free dairy products are good sources of calcium, which helps maintain strong bones. You can help keep your blood pressure under control by eating a low-salt diet that is rich in vegetables, fruits and low-fat dairy products.

"As we age, alcohol has a greater impact on our liver, kidneys and other vital organs. Alcohol can interfere with medications, reduce your appetite, and prevent restful sleep. If you choose to drink, talk to your doctor about how much alcohol is safe for *you*," Diane Cusworth said.

Tobacco causes lung damage and increases the risk of cancer and heart disease. Quitting at ANY age will improve your health. Within days of quitting, your risk of a heart attack will decrease and your body will begin to heal.

For more information about physical activity and nutrition, visit on-line at www.nyhealth.gov or call:

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140 County Highway 33W-Suite 3
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