

CD Summary

Contact: 971-673-1111 | cd.summary@state.or.us | www.healthoregon.org/cdsummary

Healthy Aging Part 1: Physical Health and Social Well-Being

Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter.

Mark Twain

Life expectancy at birth in the U.S. has increased steadily over the past 1½ centuries: in 1850, life expectancy was approximately 40 years; in 1900 it rose to 50 years; in 1950 to 70 years, and in 2000 to 80 years (with women outliving men by 3–5 years). To state this another way, in 1950 approximately 8% of the U.S. population (12 million people) was ≥65 years of age. In 2015 that percent had almost doubled to 15% (45 million people) (Figure).

In Oregon, that corresponds to >660,000 people older than 65 years. The challenge for all of us will be to ensure that we extend not just life span, but healthy years, including strong physical health and mental capacity.

Healthy aging can be defined as “the development and maintenance of optimal physical, mental, and social well-being and function in older adults.”¹ And because there is no one metric by which to assess healthy aging, the Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics has developed a comprehensive look at indicators of

health and well-being in older Americans.² With a nod to the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials' (ASTHO) Healthy Aging Initiative that frames healthy aging as a major public health issue³, we offer a 2-part *CD Summary* series that provides an overview of what we can all do to promote healthy aging in our patients (as well as ourselves!). Part 1 examines physical health and social well-being; Part 2 addresses cognitive decline and the “Healthy Brain Initiative”.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Overall: Not surprisingly, having overall good health, defined as no limitations in the past 30 days due to physical or mental health, decreases with age: 83% of 18–44 year olds; 67% of 55–64 year olds, and 63% of those ≥75 years report having no activity limitations. The prevalence of most chronic diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and arthritis, increases with age. The percent of the population reporting having any chronic disease doubles from 41% in 18–44 year olds, to 83% in those ≥75 years of age. Severe falls requiring hospitalization increase exponentially, from 46 per

100,000 persons 18–44 years, to 1809 per 100,000 population in persons ≥75 years (Table, verso). Deaths from influenza are highest among persons ≥65 years.

Health Behaviors. While overall physical health declines with age, many health behaviors improve in the population (likely due in part to the fact that many people with unhealthy behaviors die prematurely). The prevalence of smoking declines steadily with age; in Oregon, 20.1% of persons age 18–44 years report smoking tobacco, declining to 4.6% in those ≥75 years. Similarly, binge drinking is highest among Oregonians 18–44 years of age (24.6%), declining to 1.9% among those ≥75 years.

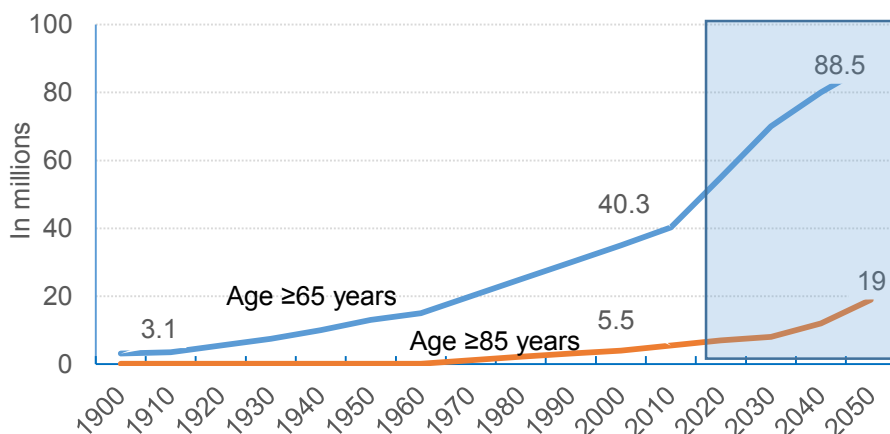
Clinical Preventive Care. More good news: older adults are more likely to get recommended screenings and vaccinations than younger adults. Whereas only 31% of Oregonians age 18–44 years had a flu shot in the past year, this percent increases to 59% in those ≥75 years. And 85% of Oregonians ≥75 years reporting having had pneumococcal vaccination.

SOCIAL WELL-BEING

Many factors that contribute to social well-being actually improve with age. Adults ≥75 years are more likely than younger adults to report having a sense of purpose, community, financial means, health insurance (of course—they have Medicare!), and being satisfied with their standard of living. In Oregon, two markers of social well-being, poverty and food insecurity, decrease dramatically with age: of adults 18–44 years, 22.9% live in poverty, and 26.3% report food insecurity, compared to 7% poverty, and 5.8% food insecurity among those ≥75 years.

Overall mental health is higher among older adults: 79.7% of adults ≥75 years report having no poor mental health days in the past month, compared only 51.3% of those 18–44 years. Older

Figure. Population aged ≥65 and ≥85 years, U.S.*



*From CDC. At A Glance 2015: Healthy Aging. See www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/aag/pdf/2015/healthyaging-aag.pdf

adults are also less likely to report worry or stress than younger adults; in Oregon 72% of adults ≥75 years report no severe stress in the past month compared to only 49% of those 18–44 years. This is not to downplay the tragedy of suicide, which increases with age, for which older men living alone are at particular risk.

HOW DOES OREGON RANK?

The United Health Foundation recently released the 2016 America's Health Rankings Senior Report⁴, in which they rank states according to a variety of policy, community and environmental factors, in addition to health outcomes and behaviors. Overall, Oregon ranks 12th, (down from 9th in 2015) with Massachusetts ranking 1st and Louisiana 50th. The point of rankings is not what “grade” we get, but rather to point out which areas we are making progress in, and where we have room to grow.

PUBLIC HEALTH STRATEGIES

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and ASTHO outline several public health strategies that help support healthy aging.^{1,5} Some examples include:

Mobility. One important factor in the overall health of older adults is being physically active and socially engaged. To that end, communities can work to ensure that seniors are able to move safely at home and in their neighbor-

hoods by having walkable streets and access to public transportation.

Fall prevention. Offering Thai Chi classes in the community is another evidence-based practice to help reduce fall risk.

Healthy eating. For older adults, under-nutrition is often as much of a health issue as obesity. Ensuring access to healthful food can be supported through programs such as Meals on Wheels, or senior Farmers' Markets.

Clinical preventive services. To ensure that seniors get their recommended clinical preventive care may involve bringing the care to them, such as holding flu vaccine clinics at the local senior citizen center.

SO WHAT'S THE SECRET?

Several studies have been published that examine factors that support “successful” aging. A review article by Nancye Peel, et al, found avoiding tobacco, maintaining a healthy weight, being physically active, and drinking alcohol moderately (or less) were associated with healthy aging across studies.⁶ A longitudinal study conducted by George Valliant and colleagues at Harvard found that, in addition to the above, having good adjustment or coping skills; maintaining strong social relationships; and continuing to pursue education (you are never too old to learn new things) were also key.⁷ Researchers at UC-Irvine, examined protective factors in

persons living to 90+ years and found: drinking moderate alcohol and coffee; being slightly over-weight; being physically active; and socially engaged promoted health and well-being.⁸

REFERENCES

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. At a glance 2015: Healthy Aging. Available at: www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/aag/pdf/2015/healthyaging-aag.pdf. Accessed 15 Jun 2017.
- Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics. Older Americans 2016: Key indicators of well-being. Available at: <https://agingstats.gov/docs/LatestReport/Older-Americans-2016-Key-Indicators-of-WellBeing.pdf>. Accessed 15 Jun 2017.
- Association of State and Territorial Health Officials. Healthy Aging. Available at www.astho.org/Prevention/Healthy-Aging/Healthy-Brain-Initiative/. Accessed Jun 15 2017.
- United Health Foundation. America's Health Rankings: Senior report 2016. Available at <http://assets.americashealthrankings.org/app/uploads/final-report-seniors-2016-edition-1.pdf>. Accessed 15 Jun 2017.
- ASTHO's 2014–2015 President's Challenge. Healthy aging: Living longer better. Available at: www.astho.org/Prevention/Healthy-Aging/Menu-of-Strategies/. Accessed 15 Jun 2017.
- Peel NM, McClure RJ, Bartlett HP. Behavioral determinants of healthy aging. *Am J Prev Med* 2005; 28: 298–304. Available at: [www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(04\)00338-1/pdf](http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(04)00338-1/pdf). Accessed 15 Jun 2017.
- George Vaillant. Successful aging. Harvard health study. Available at: www.massgeneral.org/psychiatry/assets/published_papers/Vaillant-2001-AJP.pdf. Accessed 15 Jun 2017.
- UC Irvine study. Available at: www.mind.uci.edu/research-studies/90plus-study/. Accessed 15 Jun 2017.

Table. Indicators of physical health and social well-being among Oregonians by age group 2012–2015*

	18–44 yrs	45–54 yrs-	55–64 yrs	64–75 yrs	≥75 yrs
Physical Health					
NO activity limitation (%)	83.0	73.4	67.1	66.5	62.7
Any chronic disease (%)	41.0	54.1	67.0	77.6	82.9
Cancer incidence (rate/100,000)	107.2	441.4	970.4	1731.4	2225.0
Fall hospitalization (rate/100,000)	45.7	107.0	198.0	395.8	1799.8
Tooth loss (%)	4.5	15.0	20.8	28.9	40.3
Health Behaviors					
Tobacco use (%)	20.1	20.6	16.4	10.8	4.6
Binge drinking (%)	24.6	15.0	10.8	7	1.9
Clinical Preventive Care					
Flu vaccine (%)	31.0	35.1	44.5	55.7	59.3
Pneumovax (%)	NA	NA	33.8	74.3	85.1
Colorectal screen (%)	NA	46.6	65.3	77.7	70.0
Social Well-being					
Poverty (%)	22.9	16.9	11.0	6.4	7.0
Food insecurity (%)	26.3	23.4	15.6	8.3	5.8
NO poor mental health days (%)	51.3	58.8	64.5	74.5	79.7
Minimal stress (%)	49.2	47.2	59.1	68.2	72.0

*Data from BRFS, Oregon State Cancer Registry, hospital discharge data, Oregon Immunization Registry.



Providence Portland Medical Center designates this enduring material for a maximum of .5 *AMA PRA Category 1 credit™*. Physicians should claim only the credit commensurate with the extent of their participation in the activity. Portland Providence Medical Center is accredited by the Oregon Medical Association to sponsor continuing medical education of physicians.

You can get this document in other languages, large print, braille or a format you prefer. Contact the Public Health Division at 971-673-1222. We accept all relay calls or you can dial 711. for TTY.