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## OPTIMAL AGING MANUAL, A TOME FOR WELLNESS AND SECURITY

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**Optimal Aging Manual:** *Your Guide From Experts in Medicine, Law and Finance*, edited by Kevin W. O'Neill and Renno L. Peterson (Sarasota, Fla.: Optimal Aging LLC, 2004); hardback, 1,193 pages; \$59.95.

There's some bad news, but also much good to report about the *Optimal Aging Manual*, touted by the publishers as "must reading for baby boomers and their families." Sporting articles by a mix of 56 doctors, lawyers and financial advisers arranged in three sections ("Your Body," "Special Health Issues" and "Legal and Financial Issues") plus appendices and glossaries of medical and legal terms, this extensive and beautifully illustrated reference work covers 1,193 pages and weighs in at 8 pounds, 14 ounces.

The awkwardness of this hefty text is its main disadvantage, especially for older readers. *Optimal Aging* would have been more manageable in a set of three books boxed together, for example. In addition, many older eyes will have to strain to follow the somewhat light type against the glare of the glossy pages. Also, tables are presented in colors that can be difficult for aging eyes to see. Many sections are highlighted in pastel colors that tend to blend those sections into other text on the page—a boxed or other high-contrast treatment would have been better.

*Optimal Aging* is the centerpiece of the Optimal Wellness Group, a consortium based in Sarasota, Fla., that offers an employee wellness program, including the book and a monthly newsletter. The good news is that all three sections of the book, which is available by itself, cover current thought on legal, health and social issues in very thorough, mostly well-presented chapters. Each section concludes with four to six take-home messages that summarize each chapter, along with a list of additional resources.

The legal and financial section provides an excellent review of long-term financial planning, with useful information and advice on when and how to use funds during retirement. The standard financial knowledge of educated middle-aged planners generally does not include strategies for income protection in retirement, an area well covered in *Optimal Aging*. The readable, often engaging content should fit well within the comfort zone of both lay readers and professionals taking in this important but dry subject matter. The book falls short in that it does not provide basic financial information for lower-income and moderate-income readers who cannot afford to play the equity markets. Nevertheless, many people in these income brackets have retirement plans provided through their workplace, so essential information about these plans and on how pension systems operate would have been helpful.

The book includes pleasing watercolors and drawings throughout the text. And although the language level used is complex, difficult terms are frequently explained so that the writing could be understood by most high school graduates. With its more challenging concepts, the section on life insurance is the least accessible, and is targeted more to middle-income and upper-income readers.

Social issues in health often fall victim to the seemingly more important topics of money and medicine, but *Optimal Aging* provides very meaty discussions of many of these issues, including end-of-life planning, elder abuse and spirituality. One well-researched chapter on spirituality examines its role in

maintaining the health of older adults. Furthermore, the section on travel discusses driving with an emphasis on the importance of mobility. This chapter also explores medically at-risk driving that can emerge from diseases associated with age.

The section on cosmetic surgery seemed inappropriate at first blush, yet the honest presentation of how procedures are performed will fascinate many people. The downside of the chapter is the lack of information on the negative side of these procedures.

#### HEALTH ISSUES

Overall, some chapters have more explanations and make the content more accessible than others. For example, the portion of *Optimal Aging* covering medication management is very useful, outlining the respected Beers list of nonrecommended medications for elders, food and drug interactions, and drug-drug interactions between commonly prescribed pharmaceuticals. Tips on avoiding adverse drug reactions are presented in a practical way that outlines the need for complying with medical instructions, recording medication routines and reading cautions on labels before each dosing.

*Optimal Aging* divides discussions related to different body systems—such as cardiovascular, sensory, skin and oral health—into separate chapters, allowing readers to research specific illnesses or conditions relatively easy. Again, though, the unwieldiness of this huge book—a virtual weight-lifting course in itself—makes *Optimal Aging* best used as a supplement to more readily accessible material, such as the paperback *Healthwise for Life: Medical Self-Care for Healthy Aging* by Molly Mettler, Donald W. Kemper and Diana L. Stilwell (Healthwise, 1996). This edition, produced by Kaiser-Permanente for its members, is available online from major booksellers.

For more information about *Optimal Aging*, visit the website at [www.optimalaging.com](http://www.optimalaging.com). ❖

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