

HEALTHWORD  
Putting Health Promotion Back in Motion

April 2006

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HEALTHWORD is a monthly e-mail newsletter produced by the American Society on Aging's Live Well, Live Long project, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Live Well, Live Long provides education and resources to professionals in the field of aging to help them improve health promotion and disease prevention efforts aimed at older adults. Current and past issues of this newsletter are available on the Live Well, Live Long website at <http://www.asaging.org/cdc/HealthWord.cfm>.

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FEATURE:

RESEARCH FINDINGS DEMONSTRATE THAT LIFESTYLE INFLUENCES COGNITIVE DECLINES

by Nancy Ceridwyn

Hot sellers in bookstores this year: books on how to keep the mind sharp and improve memory and sudoku puzzles. Not surprisingly, fear of losing cognitive ability haunts the coming generation of older adults as they witness the growing number of people in their parents' age group who have dementia. Thousands of older people now flock to AARP's nationwide "Staying Sharp" seminars as well as the Alzheimer's Association's "Maintain Your Brain" workshops.

The people you serve may be coming to you to learn more about brain health and mental wellness. How can you keep up with the latest research? Every year, the MetLife Foundation-sponsored MindAlert lectures given at the NCOA-ASA Joint Conference present some of the best, most up-to-date information on older adults and intellectual functioning. Each year, the

lecture is reprised as a booklet, which you can download -- at no cost -- from <http://www.asaging.org/mindalert/lectures.cfm>.

The most recent MindAlert monograph comes from K. Warner Schaie and Sherry L. Willis, two pioneers in the study of adult cognition and learning. As part of their Seattle Longitudinal Study, Schaie, Willis, and their research team have measured a number of aspects of intellectual functioning among study participants, following some individuals for as long as 42 years. Schaie and Willis have examined the data to determine when decline first appears in a particular cognitive ability. On average, declines first appear in the 60s -- somewhat earlier for spatial ability, somewhat later for verbal ability.

Variables other than mere age, however, influence the onset of decline. For example, if you are a woman, you will experience some form of decline five years later than the overall population. If you are highly educated, you get about a year's credit for every year of education above the average that you receive. If you have experienced above-average success in your life, decline also will occur later. Many of you may find that you will not experience any significant decline in your cognitive abilities until close to your death -- or maybe not even then.

The researchers also found that intellectually stimulating environments also affect the onset of cognitive declines: People who read extensively, travel, and attend cultural and educational events are at an advantage. Having a flexible personality style at midlife has a positive effect on maintaining cognitive ability.

For more ideas on how to keep older minds healthy, visit the MindAlert website at <http://www.asaging.org/mindalert>. You can find a wealth of additional information on cognitive vitality on the Live Well, Live Long project website at <http://www.asaging.org/cdc>.

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#### TOOLS YOU CAN USE:

#### 2006 MINDALERT AWARD WINNER OFFERS BRAIN HEALTH RESOURCES

Each year, the applications the American Society on Aging receives for the annual MindAlert Awards make us aware of exciting resources for improving brain health. This year was no exception. The awards committee reviewed 65 applications, a veritable gold mine of information.

One exceptional site was the Staying Sharp website, which won a 2006 MindAlert Award: [http://www.aarp.org/about\\_aarp/nrta/staying\\_sharp/](http://www.aarp.org/about_aarp/nrta/staying_sharp/).

Staying Sharp is a joint project of NRTA: AARP's Educator Community and the Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives (<http://www.dana.org>). It provides accessible information for older adults and professionals who work with them about how the human brain affects behavior throughout life.

The Staying Sharp project publishes a number of free booklets for elders, all available on the site:

\* "Quality of Life" provides an overview of ways to maintain brain health, such as staying physically active, making a difference in the community, continually learning, avoiding excessive use of alcohol and drugs, protecting one's head, and managing stress.

\* "Memory Loss and Aging" talks about the differences between changes that naturally occur with aging and changes that warrant concern.

\* "Depression" discusses the challenges of maintaining mental wellness and gives suggestions on how to live with depression and other conditions that compromise one's sense of security and well-being.

\* "Chronic Health Issues" addresses common chronic conditions, from hearing and sight impairment to chronic pain, that affect quality of life.

\* "Learning Throughout Life" talks about the human brain as a "learning machine." The booklet also provides a reading list of books by Dana Foundation neurologists who write in language that lay people can easily understand. Highlights from the reading list:

--> "Keep Your Brain Young: The Complete Guide to Physical and Emotional Health and Longevity" by Guy McKhann and Marilyn Albert (John Wiley & Sons, 2002).

--> "Keep Your Brain Alive: 83 Neurobic Exercises" by Lawrence C. Katz, Manning Rubin, and David Suter (Workman Publishing Company, 1999).

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May is Older Americans Month!

The U.S. Administration on Aging selected this year's theme, "Choices for Independence," to bolster the efforts of baby boomers and older adults to achieve healthy aging. Independence for adults as they age relies on a balance of important elements: empowerment in consumer choice, which includes finding the tools necessary to make informed decisions; access to culturally sensitive health promotion programs and opportunities; and participation in one's own healthcare. For more information on the Older Americans Month, visit [http://www.aoa.gov/press/oam/May\\_2006/Materials\\_Downloads.asp](http://www.aoa.gov/press/oam/May_2006/Materials_Downloads.asp).

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Event: 2006 CDC Diabetes Translation Conference

Dates: May 16-19, 2006

Location: Denver

The CDC's Divisions of Diabetes Translation and Nutrition and Physical Activity have joined forces to convene a national conference that will examine the rising rates of diabetes and obesity. The conference will discuss ways to combat these illnesses through improving the environment, changing policies, building better healthcare systems, and helping individuals make lifestyle changes. For more information, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/conferences/conf2006/index.htm>.

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Event: California Statewide Senior Injury Prevention Conference  
Date: May 18, 2006  
Location: Anaheim, Calif.

An array of speakers will discuss how to integrate injury prevention techniques into existing programs and how, working together, we can enhance our injury prevention efforts. The conference will also showcase prevention materials and equipment. For more information, visit [http://www.acgov.org/ems/SIPP\\_conference.htm](http://www.acgov.org/ems/SIPP_conference.htm), or contact Colleen Campbell at (510) 577-3535 or [ccampbel2@acgov.org](mailto:ccampbel2@acgov.org).

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Event: The National Medicaid Congress  
Dates: June 4-6, 2006  
Location: Washington, D.C.

Join national thought leaders for an engaging three-day session that will address critical questions about emerging Medicaid reform models, the expanded role of Medicaid managed care, new federal and state strategies to manage costs, the impact of the Medicare prescription drug benefit, and the future of long-term care coverage. For more information, visit <http://www.medicaidcongress.com/>.

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For more educational offerings in the field of aging, visit the searchable "Events in Aging" calendar on the ASA website: <http://www.asaging.org/calendar>.

Have an event related to health promotion and aging that you would like to tell your colleagues about? Please submit your event, call for papers, or grant announcements to Nancy Bui at [nbui@asaging.org](mailto:nbui@asaging.org). Include the title, organization, date and time, location, contact information, and a short description of the event.

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HEALTHWORD

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SUGGESTIONS AND QUESTIONS. For more information or comments about the newsletter, please contact Chaya Gordon, research manager at ASA, at [chayag@asaging.org](mailto:chayag@asaging.org).

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