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USA on the Move: Steps to Healthy

As a part of the President's *HealthierUS Initiative*, ***USA on the Move: Steps to Healthy Aging: Eating Better & Moving More*** is a two-part project sponsored by the USDHHS Administration on Aging (AoA) and the National Policy and Resource Center on Nutrition and Aging (Center) at Florida International University. It is designed to improve nutrition and physical activity in older adults. Simple, modest increases in daily activities can improve overall health, prevent disease and disability, and reduce health care costs for our nation.

Poor health is not a foregone consequence of aging. An active healthy lifestyle is a key component to successful aging. ***Eating Better & Moving More***, the two parts of ***Steps to Healthy Aging***, can help even frail older adults prolong their independence and improve their quality of life. Caregivers of family members, who often neglect their own physical, nutritional, and mental health, can also benefit from ***Eating Better & Moving More***.

Physical inactivity and poor diets are the major causes of America's overweight and obesity epidemic. It has been projected that by 2008 the obesity rate will reach 39% (1). Forty percent of older adults are overweight and 18% are obese (2). Obesity increases chronic disease risk, decreases functionality and independence, and lowers quality of life (3). Medicare and Medicaid programs spend \$84 billion annually on five major chronic conditions that could be significantly improved through increased physical activity and improved nutrition: diabetes, heart disease, cancer, depression, and arthritis (4). Sedentary lifestyles and inadequate diets account for 14% of all deaths in the United States (5).

Regular physical activity sustains the ability of older adults to live independently (6). One-third of older adults are inactive (7). Older women are less active than older men. African American older adults are less active than white older adults (8). Regular physical activity benefits individuals with arthritis and those with depression and anxiety. It may reduce the risk of cognitive decline in older adults (6,9). Physical activity is effective in treating heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, chronic lung disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, obesity and overweight, and arthritis (6). Regular

physical activity can improve the mobility and functioning of frail and very old adults. Weight training, flexibility, and endurance activities can also reduce the risk of fall injuries (6,10). Osteoporosis can be delayed or prevented by moderate walking. Two million men suffer from osteoporosis; it is not just a woman's disease (11).

Good nutrition prolongs independence by maintaining hearing and vision, cognitive abilities, physical strength, mobility, and endurance (12-15). Good nutrition promotes health by lowering chronic disease risk for heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, and osteoporosis (16-20). Eighty-seven percent of older Americans have one or more chronic diseases that can be improved by nutrition therapy, including cancer, chronic lung disease, congestive heart failure, dementia, diabetes mellitus, high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, obesity, and overweight (21). Forty percent of community-residing older Americans eat poorly (22). For example, three-fourths of African American and two-thirds of white older Americans eat less than the 5 recommended servings of fruits and vegetables daily (8). Up to two-thirds of hip fractures are due to inadequate calcium intake (23). Many older caregivers are likely to be at nutrition risk and benefit from nutrition interventions (24).

Steps to Healthy Aging: Eating Better & Moving More

Eating Better: This part of *Steps to Healthy Aging* encourages older adults to eat healthier. State units on aging are collecting healthy recipes and tips from Older Americans Nutrition Program participants and projects. Recipes will be easy to prepare, low cost, tasty, and nutrient-dense. Ethnic and familiar favorites will be featured. Tips will emphasize food safety, healthy eating, simple cooking methods, and ways to gain/lose weight. AoA and the Center will publish ***Eating Better*** as part of a ***Steps to Healthy Aging Guidebook*** for the Aging Network.

Moving More: This part of *Steps to Healthy Aging* is modeled after Colorado on the Move™. It uses step counters to inspire older adults to walk more. The Center is collecting step data from Aging Network programs in several states. The Center is collecting step program data with older adults at 3 senior centers in Miami, Florida. The "how tos" of implementing a ***Moving More*** program will be included in the ***Steps to Healthy Aging Guidebook*** expected to be released in Older Americans Month, May 2003.

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THE NATIONAL POLICY AND RESOURCE CENTER ON NUTRITION AND AGING is partially funded by the USDHHS Administration on Aging and is located at Florida International University in Miami. The Center's vision is to promote active healthy aging through good nutrition. The Center's mission is to integrate food and nutrition services in home and community-based social, health, and long term care systems serving older adults. The Center assists the Older Americans Act Nutrition Program that includes 4000+ Title III local providers, 655 area agencies on aging, 56 state units on aging, and 241 tribes and tribal organizations of American Indians and Alaskan Natives and 2 organizations of Native Hawaiians under Title VI. Older Americans Nutrition Programs serve about 250 million congregate and in-home meals to about 2.6 million older adults annually.

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