

The Role of Prevention – Some Ideas for the Farming Community (PSA script)

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As the adage says, “An ounce of prevention is worth more than a pound of cure.”

Despite continued advancements in curative medicine, prevention is critical to good health for young and old alike. Annual medical exams are recommended for assessing vision, hearing, balance, muscular range and mobility. Furthermore, seeking treatment for medical conditions and adhering to prescription drug regimens will help maintain health and wellbeing.

Redesigning work schedules to suit physical capabilities is an excellent way to maintain productivity without endangering safety. Several simple safety measures are recommended for senior farmers. Measures to reduce falls include: increased lighting levels in buildings; ensuring that all steps, stairs, and handrails are of excellent quality and well lighted with switches at both ends of stairs and by all entrances; and installing non-slip surfaces on walkways and steps where possible. The use of mechanized fence gates, building doors and animal handling devices reduces chances of injury, and the use of properly fitted and easily accessible personal protection devices/clothes is further helpful. Special attention should be paid to tractor operation and the ability to do so safely. Wearing rubber or leather gloves will help protect hands from injuries and contact with chemicals. Personal hearing protection devices such as -ear plugs or ear muffs can be worn to reduce hearing loss. A variety of respirators are available to protect against allergens and toxic gases. Adequate rest and frequent breaks for nutritious food increase energy levels and concentration.

Good personal health is vital for physical safety in the farming profession. Healthy eating and physical exercise form the backbone of a lifestyle that ensures a good quality of life and relative freedom from disease. Caloric requirements decrease as we grow older, and should be adjusted to meet daily physical activity. Consumption of a variety of foods is recommended for good health: whole grains, vegetables and fruits in a variety of colors, milk and milk products and lean meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs, and nuts. The use of unsaturated vegetable fats is recommended. Maintaining a healthy Body Mass Index (BMI), between 20-25, reduces the risk of chronic ailments typically associated with being overweight such as hypertension, heart disease and arthritis and preserves physical agility for more years. The health risks of being underweight include a poor memory, decreased immunity, osteoporosis with a proneness to fractures, and decreased muscle strength. Conversely, underweight may be caused by some of these health

risks. Daily physical activity reduces functional declines associated with aging, boosts mood and energy, reduces the risk of bone fractures, improves immunity and enhances quality of life. Most people require about thirty minutes of moderate physical activity daily to stay fit. Exercise intensity is less important than the total amount of time spent exercising. Walking for ten minutes three times a day is well suited to the capabilities of seniors and is as effective as 30 continuous minutes of exercise.

Consumption of alcohol in excess of daily limits or having an alcohol related abuse/dependence disorder has been found to be more prevalent in rural populations when compared to suburban and some urban residents. In addition, as the older population increases, the expectation is to observe an increase in alcoholism and adverse effects associated with heavy drinking such as cirrhosis, certain cancers or osteoporosis and associated fractures. However, drinking a small amount of alcohol (1 drink for females and 2 –drinks per male per day) may protect against heart disease and stroke. A standard drink is defined as 12 ounces of regular beer (one bottle); a 5 ounce glass of wine; or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits. The risk of dying from lung cancer is 22 times higher in men and 12 times higher in women who smoke cigarettes, as compared with those who have never smoked. Additionally, smokers are more likely to develop emphysema, bronchitis and cancer; have a two to four fold increased chance of developing coronary heart disease; are at twice the risk for having a stroke; and are ten times more likely to develop peripheral vascular disease, which may lead to limb amputations.

Important factors that contribute to Active Aging for individuals are to stay away from smoking and limit alcohol consumption; maintain a high level of physical activity; seek routine medical and dental care, including preventive screenings; and maintain active social contacts and links to faith based activities. Social support networks among peers provide an outlet for sharing the pains and joys of the aging process with others who face similar challenges of adjusting to the infirmities of increasing age. Such activities keep cognitive decline at bay, and help maintain a quality of life that keeps one physically independent, safe and medically fit.

However, prevention is not only the responsibility of the individual. The farming community might also consider focusing on prevention issues and aging at the broader community level. One such strategy might be to form local and regional partnerships among farmers, community agencies and health care providers for the purpose of identifying prevention priorities. An assessment of current resources and needs could be identified and a plan for addressing the needs

could be developed and implemented. The plans should be carefully evaluated and successful components can be shared with others in the aging farm community. This participatory partnership approach, known as community based participatory action research (CBPAR), has been utilized by numerous communities and groups of people throughout rural America and across the world to address local health issues including health promotion and disease prevention. Now is the time to indulge in activities you always yearned to do, but never had the time for when younger! The farming community is a vibrant and mature resource always available and waiting to assist!

“The secret of life is enjoying the passage of time.” James Taylor