

# Senior Sense



Vol. XV, No. 1

## *Your Resources*

### **Portable Heaters**

Portable heaters are useful during the cold winter months when you want to supplement the heat in one area of your home. They are small, easy to move, and relatively inexpensive. Two of the most commonly used portable heaters are electric and kerosene. An electric heater is an expensive way to add additional heat to your home; however, it is the only truly safe unvented heater. Although considered safe, you should follow general safety guidelines when using an electric heater.

- Plug the heater directly into an outlet. If you must use an extension cord, use a heavy-duty cord of 14-gauge wire or larger.
- Buy a heater with a tip-over safety switch, which will automatically turn the heater off if it tips over.

Kerosene heaters provide an efficient source of heat and are

usually less costly to run than an electric heater. No vent pipe or chimney is required, so they are easy to install. However, since the heater is unvented, unwanted byproducts are introduced into your house. The most dangerous pollutant is carbon monoxide (CO). This colorless, odorless and poisonous gas can build up in your blood cells as you breathe. It may reach toxic levels in minutes or over several hours. Early symptoms of poisoning include dizziness, headache, or nausea.

You can reduce indoor pollutants by leaving a window or door open when the heater is in use. Opening a door to an adjacent room helps, but may not provide enough ventilation in an airtight house with very low air exchange rates, resulting in dangerous levels of carbon monoxide (CO) and other by-products of combustion. You should have a working CO detector in any enclosed area where a kerosene heater is being operated. Newer heaters use Oxygen Depletion Sensors (ODS) which help eliminate CO

poisoning as a result of incomplete combustion. However, the sensors are not effective when incomplete combustion is caused by other factors, such as improper gas pressure, dust or dirt.

Another major concern with kerosene heaters is the excess moisture produced when using the heater. The extra moisture can condense on room surfaces, increasing the potential for wood rot, peeling paint and mold growth.

Reduce the health and safety risks of an unvented kerosene heater by following these tips.

- Purchase a new thermostatically controlled unit with an ODS pilot
- Buy a heater with a wide base and a safety shut-off device
- Follow the operation and maintenance instructions and do not substitute fuel oils
- Do not operate for more than 4 hours at a time
- Do not use flammable solvents such as aerosol sprays or lacquers near the heaters
- Always provide outside ventilation

Whenever you use a portable heater, make sure it is at least 36 inches from combustible materials such as curtains and furniture. Finally, don't ever leave a heater on when you are away from your home or sleeping.

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## *Your Relationships*

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### **Declines in Mental Ability**

It is never easy to see a loved one's physical or mental health decline, but as America's population continues to age, this possibility is affecting more and more spouses, friends, and children of seniors. Not only can it be difficult to cope with the reality of watching another's declining abilities, but it may also be challenging to communicate effectively with your loved one. Despite such obstacles, however, there are ways for you to cope with the situation while still interacting positively with those special people in your life.

One step in easing this adjustment is to visit your loved one often if she is in residential care. Spend time together, encourage participation in her favorite activities, go out for shopping or for meals, engage with your loved one in activities at the home, and encourage contact with other residents. By promoting such positive interaction, your loved one will enjoy her days to the fullest and you will be more at ease, resting assured that this special someone is content.

When failing mental conditions interfere with normal relationships or communicative abilities, recognize that there may be ways to effectively handle such conditions. The US Surgeon General reports that nearly 20% of Americans aged 55 and older experience mental disorders that are not part of normal aging. Some of the most common of these disorders include anxiety, dementia, and

depression.

Anxiety is characterized by one's inability to cope with normal fears and worries to the extent that it interferes with daily living. One way to help someone who has anxiety is to practice active listening – a technique in which you respond to someone in a manner that demonstrates you have truly listened and understood. Active listening involves paraphrasing the speaker's comments back to him, reflecting on the emotions you have gathered from the conversation, or asking leading questions that allow your loved one to expand on what he is feeling. Active listening not only shows concern and support, but it also helps someone experiencing anxiety release the nervousness and concerns that he is feeling.

Dementia involves a loss of mental abilities caused by the death or degeneration of brain cells that is not part of normal aging. People with dementia experience memory loss, fail to recognize familiar people or objects, have hallucinations, or may lose the ability to speak. People with dementia often experience life from moment to moment, so try not to be upset if they forget your visits, calls and cards. If the individual is irrational, do not try to reason with her or make her understand. Simply agree with what is being said and then move on to another subject. Keep in mind that, even if your friend is unable to respond or communicate with you, your visit is important.

Last, depression is a disorder marked by feelings of sadness and despair. When these feelings become severe enough to conflict with day-to-day activities and routines, treatment is necessary. Fortunately, depression is very treatable through medication. Active listening can also be effective when speaking to a depressed loved one, in addition to professional therapy.

Regardless of the cause, the following tips are applicable when interacting with seniors with declining mental abilities:

- Be calm and understanding;
- Be patient and flexible;
- If something seems wrong, help the person try to name the feeling;
- Don't argue, try to convince, or ask for an explanation;
- Is something wanted or needed? If so, acknowledge it and respond.

If you may think your loved one may have symptoms of one of the above disorders, consult a doctor. Remember, aging is a part of life, but declining mental abilities can often be treated.

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## ***Your Health***

### **Do the Dietary Guidelines Apply To Me?**

Every five years the U.S. Dietary Guidelines are revised. These Guidelines influence how federal

nutrition programs like feeding sites at Senior Centers are run. They also show us how to choose and prepare the best foods to stay well as we get older.

The latest version of the Dietary Guidelines include specific recommendations for those over age 50. Let's examine each one separately:

**First, get adequate nutrients within your calorie needs.** Select healthier, unprocessed foods that contain less saturated fat, trans fats, cholesterol, added sugar, salt and alcohol.

If you are over age 50, take a supplement or eat foods fortified with Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> to protect your nervous system. We absorb B<sub>12</sub> less well from regular food as we get older, so you may risk a deficiency. Most multivitamin supplements have enough B<sub>12</sub> to meet your needs. You may also need a supplement or foods fortified with Vitamin D for bone health especially if you are dark skinned or rarely in the sun.

**Second, balance your calories from food and beverages with physical activity.** As we get older, our metabolism slows so we need to eat less and do more. Talk to your doctor before you try to lose weight. If you need to slim down, lose only 1-2 pounds per week. Eat more fruits, vegetables, whole grains and reduced-fat or fat-free dairy foods. Cut back on the empty calories from sweets, sweet drinks and fatty foods.

**Be physically active five or more days a week for a total of 30 minutes**

**per day.** You may want to take a walk, do yard work, ride a bike, or dance. You can divide the 30 minutes up into shorter segments throughout the day. Also doing activities that promote flexibility and strength will keep your muscles strong. Try gentle yoga, tai chi and exercises with free weights. Physical activity will strengthen your heart, maintain your balance and help keep you independent.

**Replace foods high in added sugar and refined starch with 2 ½ cups of vegetables per day (not French fries) and 2 cups of fruit per day.** Choose fruits and vegetables that are dark or bright in color. We also need at least three small servings of whole grain foods each day like whole wheat bread, oatmeal, brown rice and whole wheat pasta. Also consume 3 cups per day of fat-free or reduced-fat milk or equivalent dairy foods.

**Limit solid fats that are high in saturated fat and trans fatty acids.** These include butter, high-fat meat, poultry with skin and foods made with partially hydrogenated vegetable oils. Instead get moderate amounts of fat from fatty fish, nuts and liquid vegetable oils. Ask a dietitian or doctor how much fat you need each day since everyone is different.

**Limit sodium to less than 2300 milligrams per day.** That equals about one teaspoon of salt. That amount includes the sodium already in restaurant and processed foods. If you have high blood pressure, limiting

sodium intake to 1500 milligrams per day or less may be needed. Eat more fresh foods prepared with little or no salt. Also eat more potassium-rich foods like fruits and vegetable to promote heart and blood vessel health.

**If you drink alcohol, have no more than two drinks per day if you are a man and one drink per day if you are a woman.** Discuss alcohol use with your doctor if you take any medicine or have a chronic disease. Also never drink if you are driving or operating machinery.

**Prepare and store food safely.** As we age, we are more at risk for food poisoning. Do not drink raw milk or eat raw or partially cooked eggs, meat, poultry, fish, shellfish or bean sprouts. Cook food thoroughly and refrigerate perishable food immediately after a meal. Defrost food only in the refrigerator. Heat deli meats or hot dogs to steaming hot before eating.

Don't be overwhelmed by these new Guidelines. Choose one to work on at first. Then as it becomes routine, adopt the others gradually. You may be surprised at how much better you feel as each one becomes a regular part of your life.

### **Mexican Pizza**

*This recipe is good as a light meal or appetizer. To cut the sodium, use cooked frozen or fresh corn prepared without salt and rinse the black beans with water for one minute in a colander. If you are counting grams of carbohydrate, subtract the grams of fiber from the*

### ***total grams of carbohydrate.***

Non-stick cooking spray  
2 whole wheat fat free tortillas  
¼ cup canned corn, drained  
¼ cup canned black beans, drained  
¼ cup canned tomatoes with green chilies  
¼ cup shredded part skim mozzarella cheese

1. Cut two pieces of aluminum foil slightly larger than the diameter of the tortillas.
2. Spray the dull side of the two pieces of foil with non-stick spray.
3. Place one tortilla on one piece of the sprayed foil.
4. Layer the tortilla evenly with the corn, beans, tomatoes and cheese.
5. Top with the second tortilla.
6. Place the second piece of foil over the pizza.
7. Iron one side of the pizza layered in foil with a hot iron (yes, an iron like you would iron clothes)
8. Turn over and iron the other side of the tortilla covered in foil.
9. Keep turning and ironing until the cheese is melted and the pizza is warm.
10. Cut into 4-8 slices with a knife or pizza wheel. Serve immediately.

Nutrition information:

|              |                |
|--------------|----------------|
| Calorie      | 271            |
| Fat          | 4 grams        |
| Sodium       | 917 milligrams |
| Carbohydrate | 47 grams       |
| Protein      | 16 grams       |
| Fiber        | 23 grams       |

Exchanges: 3 starches and 1 very lean meat



THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

# COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Colleges of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences & Family and Consumer Sciences

Dear Friend:

SENIOR SENSE is a quarterly publication provided by your local county Cooperative Extension office. It is prepared by Extension Family & Consumer Sciences specialists at The University of Georgia specifically for the educational needs of older Georgians.

Please contact your local Cooperative Extension office for more information on these and related topics.

**Learning** *for* **Life**

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