



council on aging

HAPPY FOURTH OF JULY!



JULY/AUGUST 2025

SONOMA SENIORS TODAY

Home is Where the Heart is: Aging in Place Independently

By Denise Johnson, MS, Senior Nutrition and Health Director

The Senior Nutrition and Health Director of Council on Aging was asked to present at the Age & Action Conference held in Arlington, VA, in May 2025. The presentation "Home is Where the Heart Is: Aging in Place Independently" offers an in-depth look at a critical initiative that supports older adults in maintaining independence, health, and connection.

Spearheaded by the Council on Aging and funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Sonoma County, this program provides a holistic, evidence-based response to the growing need for aging-in-place solutions.

The Crisis: Falls Among Older Adults

Falls are the leading cause of injury and injury-related death among adults aged 65 and older. Each year, nearly 3 million emergency room visits and 1 million hospitalizations are attributed to falls. With projections showing fall-related healthcare costs exceeding \$100 billion annually by 2030, the urgency of preventive strategies is clear.

The statistics are staggering:

- 1 in 10 falls leads to serious injury or medical intervention.
- 83% of hip fractures due to falls result in death in older adults.
- Falls are the leading cause of traumatic brain injuries in seniors.

Understanding Risk Factors

There are three categories of increased fall risk, and the more of these risk factors an older adult has, the greater the likelihood is that they will experience a fall.

- Physical: Muscle weakness, vision/hearing problems, chronic conditions, and side effects from medications. Environmental: Poor lighting, loose rugs, uneven surfaces, bad weather, and no grab bars.
- Behavioral: Risky actions and reduced physical activity due to fear of falling.

The Aging in Place Program

The Aging in Place program takes a whole-person approach, addressing emotional, social, physical, nutritional, and mental well-being. This is an 8-week initiative offered at no charge to low-income housing residents 60+.

Each cohort meets twice weekly and includes:

- Physical movement sessions.
- Education on nutrition and health topics.
- Two nutritious meals per week.

Participants also complete standardized universal assessments like the PHQ-9 for depression, the Satisfaction with Life Scale, and functional mobility tests.

Outcomes That Matter

Among 34 program completers:

- Mild depression decreased by 15%. (See Chart 2)
- Satisfaction with life scores improved by 21%. (See Chart 3)
- Leg strength and balance showed statistically significant improvements increasing by 27%. (See Chart 1)
- Participants reported increased fruit and vegetable consumption, physical activity, and improved social bonds with neighbors they hadn't interacted with before.

Community Impact

Participants praised the program for improving their health, mental outlook, and community connections. Many noted the supportive, fun environment and the value of learning simple exercises and nutrition tips. One participant said, "This class was the best! I'd like to have more like this. They are excellent to keep us healthy and to stay at home for a long time."

CHART 1 30-Second Sit to Stand Measures Leg Strength & Endurance

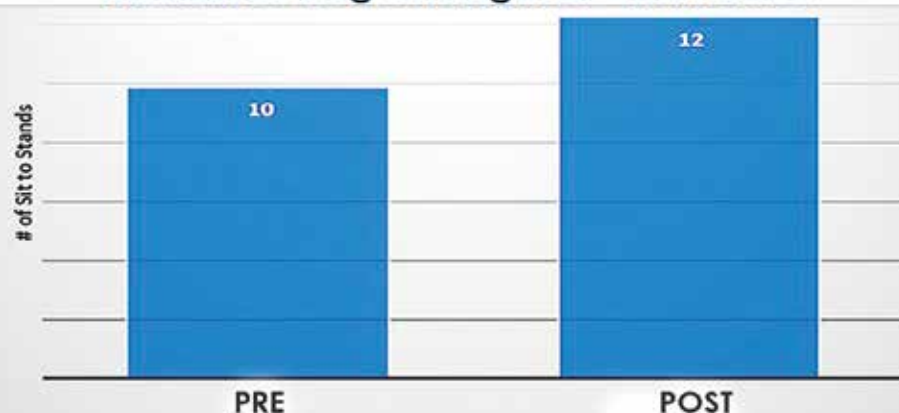


CHART 2 PHQ-9 – Measures Depression

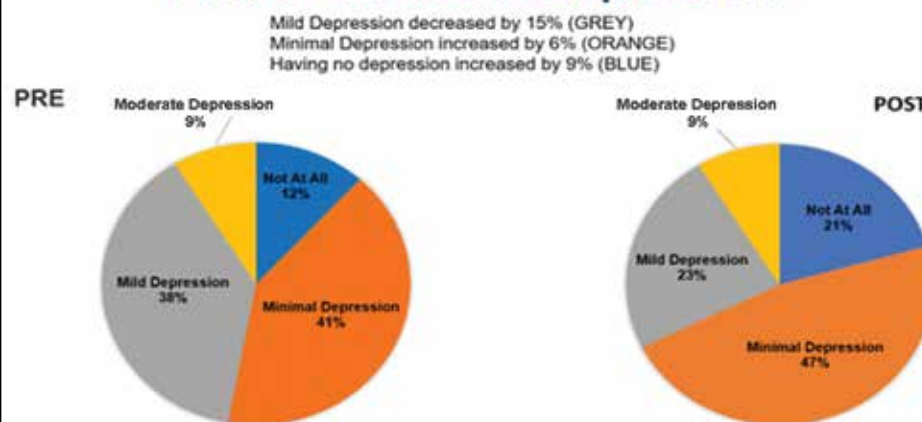
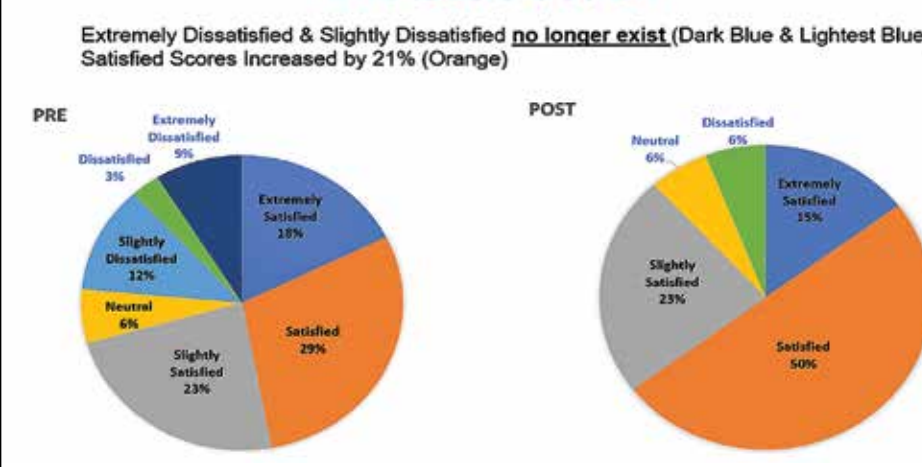


CHART 3 Life Satisfaction



Looking Ahead

With the aging population living longer it is important we address fall prevention to assist in reducing healthcare costs. The Aging in Place model serves as a scalable, compassionate solution to promote independence, reduce isolation, and empower older adults to thrive in their communities. Ongoing funding is essential to sustain the Aging in Place program and reduce fall risk among our rapidly growing older adult population. We invite businesses to join us in driving positive change by funding and supporting this important initiative. Your organization's involvement will directly contribute to creating lasting benefits for the communities you serve.

If your organization is interested in supporting this initiative and demonstrating leadership in community engagement, we would be delighted to connect and explore partnership opportunities. Please contact: Denise Johnson – djohnson@councilonaging.com | (707) 525-0143 ext. 119.

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Meals on Wheels: More Than a Meal—A Lifeline for Seniors

By Denise Johnson, MS, Senior Nutrition and Health Director

Meals on Wheels (MOW) provides more than just nutritious meals—we deliver vital social connection and serve as a critical safety net for vulnerable seniors living alone.

One powerful example comes from Roberto, a longtime MOW driver. Recently, while on his regular route, Roberto arrived at a client's home and heard faint cries for help coming from inside. Trusting his instincts, he knocked and called out. When he found the door unlocked, he entered and discovered the client lying on the floor—she had fallen and unable to get up for over six hours.

Thanks to Roberto's quick thinking, he immediately called 911 and stayed with her, offering comfort and reassurance until emergency responders arrived. His presence likely prevented further injury and brought a sense of calm during



a frightening moment. This story is a powerful reminder that Meals on Wheels is about more than nourishment—it's about compassion, human connection, and community support. For many isolated older adults, our drivers and volunteers are their only daily point of contact, making every visit a potentially life-saving one.

"Fun" for a Healthier Life

By Nyah Reynolds, PEARLS Coach, Council on Aging

In the PEARLS program, we help older adults experiencing depression and social isolation by working together to solve problems and increase activities. One activity we encourage clients to plan at every session is something they find pleasant—something that brings them joy or makes them happy. We ask, "What feels fun, fulfilling, or meaningful to you?" Often, clients hesitate. They say, "I don't know what's fun for me anymore," or, "I don't have time for that. I've got too much going on." Planning something pleasant or fun may feel trivial against the challenges one is experiencing, but here's the truth—fun is not frivolous. It's vital!

As adults, especially older adults, we often have to work a little harder to make space for fun. Life brings responsibilities, losses, health issues, and changes in routine. But even in the middle of all that—especially in the middle of it—we need joy. Research shows that enjoyable activities, whether it's gardening, painting, walking with a friend, or singing along to the radio, are linked to lower levels of depression, reduced stress, and better overall health. Psychiatrist Dr. Stuart Brown once said, "The opposite of play is not work. It's depression." What a powerful idea. When we stop giving ourselves permission to enjoy life, we can feel disconnected and isolated. But when we reintroduce fun, even in small ways, it opens up the world again. It reminds us of who we are and what matters. It helps us remember that life was good, is good, and can still be good.

In PEARLS, we help clients build these moments into their routines again. What's fun or meaningful looks different for everyone. The key is to find something that lifts your spirits and gives you something to look forward to.



Nyah Reynolds

It could be listening to a favorite jazz record while cooking, sitting outside with a good book, or sharing stories with a neighbor. And if you're not sure what feels fun anymore, that's okay. It's never too late to rediscover it. Talking to someone like a PEARLS coach, a friend or a neighbor may help brainstorm ideas. Sometimes, we need to

experiment to find what still sparks joy in this new chapter of life.

It's time to think of mental health and what supports it, not as an afterthought but as a priority. Life isn't just about surviving—it's about thriving! And thriving means making room for joy, connection, and those small but powerful moments that bring us back to ourselves. Even 15 minutes a day of something you enjoy can make a real difference. Studies in the Journal of Aging and Health confirm that even small bursts of enjoyable activity can reduce symptoms of depression and improve the quality of life in older adults. To be clear, fun won't erase life's problems—but it does add something essential. It brings balance. It reminds us that we are more than our challenges. We are creative, joyful, interesting people with stories to tell and moments to enjoy. As a PEARLS coach, I invite you to ask yourself—What's one thing you could do this week just for fun? Write it down. Make time for it. Treat it like the essential part of your health that it is. Let's reclaim fun—not as a reward for productivity, but as a vital part of living well because you deserve a life that feels good.

If you are interested in learning more about the PEARLS program please call me, Nyah Reynolds, at (707) 525-0143 x 130 or email me at nreynolds@councilonaging.com.

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To enhance the quality of life for our aging community by providing services that promote well-being and maintain independence.

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Red Flags of Scams: How to Recognize and Protect Yourself

By Denise Johnson, MS, Senior Nutrition and Health Director

While attending the Age & Action Conference, the Director of Senior Nutrition and Health attended a keynote presentation on scams. The following insights reflect the key takeaways from that session. In today’s digital world, scams and fraud are increasingly sophisticated and common. Whether through emails, text messages, social media, or phone calls, scammers use deceptive tactics to manipulate people into giving away personal information or money. While fraud and scams are often used interchangeably, they involve different methods.

Fraud involves the unauthorized use of your personal or financial information—like stolen credit card numbers or hacked bank accounts—without your knowledge or consent.

Scams, on the other hand, manipulate you into voluntarily handing over sensitive information, money, or access by building false trust or creating a sense of urgency.

Common Red Flags of Scams

Too Good to Be True

Scammers often promise unrealistic rewards—such as guaranteed returns on investments, unexpected lottery winnings, or job offers with high pay and little effort. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

Urgency or Pressure to Act Quickly

Scammers rely on panic and impulsive decisions. They may say you’ll miss out on a limited-time

offer or threaten legal consequences unless you act immediately.

Told Not to Talk to Anyone

Being told to keep the situation a secret or not speak to friends, family, or coworkers is a major red flag. Scammers don’t want anyone to warn you.

Asked to Switch Communication Platforms

If someone insists on moving a conversation from a legitimate platform to a private app or text message (like WhatsApp or Telegram), be cautious. Scammers often do this to avoid being monitored.

Unusual or Specific Payment Methods

Be wary if someone asks you to pay using methods that are hard to trace or recover, such as Wire transfers, Prepaid debit cards, Cryptocurrency, Gift cards. Remember: Gift cards are for gifts—not for making payments. No legitimate organization, especially government agencies, will ask you to pay with gift cards or cryptocurrency.

Unsolicited Contact

Be cautious of unexpected calls, texts, emails, or social media messages—especially from someone claiming to be a government official, a bank representative, or a tech support agent. Scammers often impersonate trusted organizations to gain your confidence.

Online Friends in a Crisis

If someone you met online claims to be in an emergency and asks for money, it’s likely a scam. Romance or friendship scams often begin with genuine-seeming connections, followed by fabricated crises.

The **Better Business Bureau (BBB)** is a trusted national organization dedicated to helping individuals who have experienced scams. The BBB provides reliable resources and support not only to report scams but also to guide victims through the often-overwhelming aftermath.

Being targeted by a scam can take a toll—financially, emotionally, and mentally. It's not always easy to know where to turn or what steps to take next. The BBB can assist you every step of the way, offering tools, guidance, and compassionate support to help you recover and regain confidence.

Whether you're unsure how to report the scam, need help understanding your rights, or are looking for ways to protect yourself in the future, the BBB is there to help. No one should have to face the impact of a scam alone. Visit [BBB.org/ScamTracker](https://www.bbb.org/scamtracker) to report a scam and access their full library of recovery resources.

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Contact: rjones@councilonaging.com

PUZZLES & GAMES

Puzzle solutions are on page 8

WORD SCRAMBLE
"July the Fourth"

1. SOWERFIRK	- - - - -
2. YILTERB	- - - - -
3. EDEFORM	- - - - -
4. AECIMAR	- - - - -
5. ECEENNPDEIDN	- - - - -
6. FALG	- - - -
7. VEETRNAS	- - - - -
8. SSTAR	- - - - -
9. SRISETP	- - - - -
10. TPTIORA	- - - - -
11. CMCYDAORE	- - - - -
12. LVAEUS	- - - - -

SUDOKU - Medium

3	9				1	2		
4	1			8	6			3
7	2		3	5				
					3			2
1				4				
6	4		8		5	7	3	9
8			1			4		
			5			8		7
			9	6		3		

SUDOKU - Hard

9	6		1			3		
	5				2		4	
				4		8		
			3		5		8	9
					4			5
		1		6			7	4
				3				
3			9	2				
		8				4	1	

WORD SEARCH
"Fabrics"

Tulle	Organza
Chambray	Silk
Flannel	Batiste
Jersey	Gabardine
Brocade	Muslin
Corduroy	Crepe

CROSSWORD PUZZLE
"Independence Day"

ACROSS

- 1 Smack
5 Tender loving care
8 Can
12 Reeled
13 Shout
15 Berate
16 Wheel
17 Reason
18 Hand wear
19 Adhere
21 Public procession of people and things
23 Limpid
25 US flag color of seven of the stripes
26 George, plaster cast artist
29 Little bit
31 Small wrapped candies
35 French pancake treats
37 Yank
39 Cleaning agent
40 Vase
41 Belongs to Sir Isaac
44 United States of America
45 Substance that is ingested by living creatures
47 California (abbr.)
48 Informal outdoor meal
50 Trick
52 Game official
54 Move up to
55 Woeful
57 Capital of Morocco
59 Song of patriotism
62 Fabric
65 Package label
66 Cheat
68 Zooms
70 Air (prefix)
71 Out loud
72 Decorative needle case
73 Inclined plane
74 Exceed
75 Loch __ monster

DOWN

- 1 Pacific Time
2 Heroic
3 Loop
4 Patella
5 Menace
6 Record
7 Daring deed
8 Navies
9 Data transmission rate
10 Span between birth and death
11 Imp
13 Moving swell of fabric caused by the wind
14 Fruit
20 Ethan that led the Green Mountain Boys
22 Rock group
24 Dangerous snake
26 Shuffle
27 Flub
28 City
30 Dynamic __
32 Hillock
33 Herb
34 Quickly
36 Part of a min.
38 Gross national product (abbr.)
42 Struggle
43 Strong rope fiber
46 Floor cleaner (2 wds.)
49 Person belonging by birth or naturalization to a nation
51 Morse code "T"
53 Face upwards
56 Prefix ten
58 Group of people playing musical instruments
59 Realm
60 Reference point
61 Cast off
63 Refer to
64 Sonata
65 Distant
67 San Diego attraction
69 Bro.'s sibling

WORD SEARCH "Fabrics"

L	C	K	L	D	I	T	U	L	L	E	B	D	S	V	O
V	O	Z	V	T	Z	R	F	Z	A	A	W	Z	S	U	B
N	R	Z	R	Z	R	Y	W	T	C	P	N	O	U	A	F
B	D	H	Z	U	Z	X	A	X	D	Z	M	F	R	L	D
N	U	A	I	H	L	Q	B	A	J	T	H	E	Q	A	O
U	R	E	D	U	H	T	C	R	E	P	E	E	D	Y	E
Z	O	L	U	B	A	T	I	S	T	E	C	T	L	N	V
O	Y	V	Q	C	H	A	M	B	R	A	Y	D	I	N	K
R	W	M	N	P	F	G	T	T	B	S	U	D	E	P	U
G	N	V	L	F	L	S	P	P	I	D	R	D	L	Y	K
A	W	S	B	T	A	N	Y	S	W	A	A	S	E	O	R
N	F	A	N	E	N	G	M	P	B	C	B	S	B	V	J
Z	U	X	V	N	N	M	S	A	O	S	R	D	P	M	Q
A	H	A	H	Y	E	H	G	R	L	E	I	E	G	U	A
P	L	A	O	H	L	B	B	N	J	X	V	L	E	M	S
M	U	S	L	I	N	N	R	E	O	J	S	W	K	Q	R

PEARLS Testimonial, Ellen "Sunshine" Semm

Sunshine

“I was interested to participate in PEARLS because I have always managed my own stuff independently, but then thought there might be new stuff that I don’t know about, and decided that I ought to give it a try. I’ve had a history of

"I've always preferred everything to be planned.

"I love this program, and I think it's wonderful. I think this needs to be shared with more people, not just those in crisis. I have no criticism of PEARLS at all—it's a very useful program, and I wish they could make it more widely available so more people can benefit in the ways that I did."



Hot Summer Nights
Rainbow Chard

INGREDIENTS:

Makes 2 Servings

- 2 Tablespoons Raw (skin-on) California Almonds
- ½ Pound Rainbow Chard (About 1 Bunch)
- ½ Shallot, Finely Sliced
- ½ Teaspoon Lemon Zest
- 1 Tablespoon Fresh Lemon Juice
- ½ Tablespoon White Wine Vinegar
- ¼ Teaspoon Cumin Seeds, Crushed
- 2 Tablespoons Extra-Virgin Olive Oil (Plus some for Drizzling)
- 3 Medjool Dates, Coarsely Chopped
- ½ Cup Kalamata Olives, Pitted and Coarsely Chopped
- Kosher Salt and Fresh Black Pepper to Taste

METHOD:

Preheat oven to 350°. Toast almonds on rimmed baking sheet, tossing once, until slightly darkend, 6-8 minutes. Let cool, then roughly chop.

Remove ribs and stems from the chard, tear leave into 3" pieces. Cut thicker ends of the stems on a diagonal into 1" pieces. Reserve thin stem pieces.

Combine shallot, lemon juice and zest with the vinegar and cumin seeds in a bowl with a pinch of salt and some freshly ground black pepper and whisk.

In a cast iron skillet, add the olive oil. When the oil is warm, add the chard except the thin stem pieces and sauté until almost tender; then add the thin stems and cook for another minute and turn off the heat.

Into a bowl for tossing, add the chard, dates, olives and toss with the vinaigrette onto two plates (add protein now if desired) and top with the toasted almonds.

Bilingual Care Navigator

Gloria Ramirez



Who Can Benefit?
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NUTRITION NEWS

Improving Brain Health



Before we dive in, let's first discuss what brain health is. Brain health is an umbrella term that encompasses cognitive health and a variety of different functions such as motor, emotional, tactile, and sensory functions. How we learn, remember details, move, and balance are all a part of these different functions. The health and performance of these different areas can be significantly affected as we age. Overall health and wellness, environmental factors, physical activity, and social behaviors play a very large role in how our brain ages and performs in our older years. How can we ensure our brain and all its functions stay as healthy as possible for as long as possible?

The top three ways to maintain or improve brain health are participating in regular exercise, engaging in mentally stimulating activities, and eating a balanced, nutrient-rich diet. The term 'regular exercise' might seem very daunting, however, it does not need to be. The CDC recommends 150 minutes of moderate intensity movement per week. Now, 150 minutes seems like a lot! But if you spread that time across 5 days, that is only 30 minutes of movement per day! Regular exercise can mean a lot of things. For some, it's walking for 30 minutes every day, going for a hike, or playing pickleball. For others, it's marching in place while sitting down or completing daily household chores. The activity doesn't matter so much as long as you're moving your body for at least 30 minutes a day. Regular physical activity has shown to help improve mood, learning ability, and memory! Start by adding 10 minutes of activity into your daily routine and slowly work up to 30 minutes. You'll be amazed at the results!

Next, participating in mentally stimulating activities has shown to improve memory, processing speed, and reasoning. Activities like playing games (cards, chess, Sudoku, etc.), doing puzzles, reading, playing an instrument, or listening to music are all excellent ways to stimulate your brain and improve overall brain health. Many online games or activities may claim to improve memory, however, there is not enough research on whether online games have the same effect as in person/physical games or activities. If possible, stick to as many tangible cognitive activities as you can.

Lastly, nutrition plays a huge role in overall brain health. Four key nutrients that have shown to improve brain function are omega 3 fatty acids, B vitamins, vitamin D, and antioxidants. These nutrients can be found in food items like salmon, tuna, dark leafy greens, berries, walnuts, dark chocolate, dairy products, and whole grains. It is important to prioritize intakes of these nutrients. A popular diet called the MIND diet (Mediterranean - DASH Diet Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay) combines characteristics from the Mediterranean Diet and the DASH diet. This way of eating emphasizes intake of berries, vegetables, whole grains, and lean meats which has shown to help slow or even delay cognitive decline.

For further information, contact your primary doctor or the Council on Aging dietitian, Vanessa at 707-525-0143 ext. 137.

Written By: Vanessa Hasslinger, MS, RDN, Council on Aging

PUZZLE SOLUTIONS

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SCRAMBLE "July the Fourth"

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2. YILTERB	L i b e r t y
3. EDEFORM	F r e e d o m
4. AECIMAR	A m e r i c a
5. ECEENNPDEIDN	I n d e p e n d e n c e
6. FALG	F l a g
7. VEETRNAS	V e t e r a n s
8. SSTAR	S t a r s
9. SRISETP	S t r i p e s
10. TPTIORA	P a t r i o t
11. CMCYDAORE	D e m o c r a c y
12. LVAEUS	V a l u e s

SUDOKU - Medium

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SUDOKU - Hard

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council on aging

Caregiver Corner: Protect Loved Ones with Dementia from Heat-Related Risks

by Jamie Escoubas, Council on Aging

As temperatures climb during the summer months, the risks associated with heat become a serious concern—especially for individuals living with dementia. Dementia affects more than just memory and cognition; it can also impact a person’s ability to recognize danger, communicate discomfort, or make safe decisions. These challenges make people with dementia especially vulnerable to heat-related illnesses, such as dehydration, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke.



Jamie Escoubas

For family caregivers, being aware of these risks and taking proactive steps to ensure the safety and comfort of your loved one is essential. Early prevention and close observation are crucial during hot weather to avoid dangerous situations like heat stroke or severe dehydration.

Understanding how the following dementia-related symptoms affect heat sensitivity can help you, as a caregiver, stay one step ahead.

Impaired Judgment and Decision-Making

People with dementia may not recognize that it’s too hot to be outside or that they need to drink water. They may also dress inappropriately for the weather, such as wearing heavy clothing on a hot day, or they may forget to turn on a fan or air conditioning. Dementia can reduce a person’s ability to perceive or communicate that they are hot, thirsty, or unwell. They may not remember to drink fluids or take off extra layers of clothing.

Decreased Ability to Communicate Discomfort

A person with dementia might not be able to say they are feeling hot, thirsty, dizzy, or unwell. They may become agitated or restless without being able to explain why, making it harder for caregivers to recognize signs of heat stress or dehydration.

Reduced Sensation of Thirst

As dementia progresses, the natural sensation of thirst may diminish. This can lead to inadequate fluid intake, even when the body is already becoming dehydrated. Older adults, including those with dementia, may not feel thirsty even when their body needs fluids. This makes dehydration more likely and harder to detect.

Memory Loss

Forgetfulness can cause someone with dementia to miss meals or drinks entirely. They may forget where drinks are located, that they were offered water, or that they already had something to drink (and need more).

Difficulty with Mobility

Limited mobility can prevent a person with dementia from moving to a cooler area, getting a drink, or adjusting the environment (like opening a window or turning on a fan). If left alone, a person with dementia may be less able to move to a cooler environment or seek help when they are overheated.

Behavioral Changes

Dementia can cause confusion, agitation, or wandering. During hot weather, wandering outside into the sun or heat can quickly become dangerous. A person might also resist efforts to cool down, such as taking off a sweater or drinking water.

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For decades, Council on Aging has had the privilege to offer Day Respite Programs giving seniors who live with dementia a safe and engaging group space to spend their day, while providing caregivers with much-needed respite.

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Sensory Processing Issues

Some people with dementia may not feel the heat the way others do. Their body may not respond normally to rising temperatures, and they might not sweat effectively to cool down, making them more susceptible to overheating. Also, some medications commonly prescribed for dementia or related conditions, such as diuretics or antipsychotics, can increase sensitivity to heat or contribute to dehydration.

Staying properly hydrated and cool is essential for the health and well-being of older adults, especially during warmer months or in overheated indoor environments. As a caregiver, taking proactive steps to support hydration and maintain a safe, comfortable atmosphere can make a significant difference in your loved one’s quality of life. Below are practical tips to help you encourage fluid intake, create a cool environment, stay vigilant, and prepare for heat-related challenges—ensuring your loved one remains safe and well-cared-for.

Encourage Regular Fluid Intake

- Offer small amounts of water throughout the day, not just at mealtimes.
- Provide a variety of fluids: fruit-infused water, diluted juice, herbal teas, or electrolyte drinks (avoid sugary or caffeinated options in excess).
- Use cups that are easy to hold and brightly colored to draw attention.
- Incorporate water-rich foods like watermelon, cucumber, yogurt, and soup into their diet.

Create a Cool, Comfortable Environment

- Use fans or air conditioning when possible. Close blinds during peak heat hours.
- Help your loved one dress in light, breathable clothing.
- Offer cool damp washcloths or encourage a lukewarm shower or sponge bath.
- Avoid outdoor activities during the hottest parts of the day (typically between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.).

Monitor and Support Consistently

- Set reminders or use a timer to encourage regular drinking.
- Watch for early signs of heat-related issues, even if your loved one doesn’t complain.
- Check on them frequently if they are spending time alone in another room.
- Involve others—neighbors, friends, or respite caregivers—who can help you monitor and support hydration and cooling efforts.

Prepare Ahead

- Keep a hydration chart or schedule to track fluid intake.
- Make a list of your loved one’s medications and know which ones may increase heat sensitivity.
- Have a plan in case of a heatwave or power outage that compromises cooling options.

Caring for someone with dementia during the summer months comes with unique challenges, but with planning, vigilance, and simple daily habits, you can significantly reduce the risk of heat-related illness. Remember: staying hydrated and cool isn’t just a comfort issue—it’s a vital part of your loved one’s health and safety.

Your role as a caregiver is critical, and the steps you take now can make a significant difference. When in doubt, consult with your loved one’s healthcare provider for personalized advice, especially during extreme heat events.

What to Watch for: Signs of Heat-Related Illness

- Dry mouth, cracked lips, or dark urine (signs of dehydration)
- Dizziness or confusion
- Headache or nausea
- Rapid pulse or breathing
- Skin feels hot and dry or heavy sweating
- Fainting or unusual tiredness

If your loved one displays any of these symptoms, seek medical attention promptly.

COA's First Annual Volunteer Huddle a Resounding Success

By Leigh Galten, Volunteer Coordinator

The Council on Aging (COA) hosted its inaugural Volunteer Huddle on Thursday, May 22, bringing together volunteers from nearly all of its programs. The event offered a meaningful opportunity for volunteers to connect with each other, meet new CEO Jamie Escoubas, and gain a deeper understanding of COA's mission and operations.

Lunch, prepared by COA's kitchen, sparked lively conversations among volunteers, who shared stories about their routes, service sites, and the joy they experience through connecting with clients. Volunteers in attendance represented a wide range of programs, including Meals on Wheels (MOW), Community Table, Adult Day Respite, Senior Peer Support, Lunch Companion, Aging in Place, MOW Kitchen, Drive-Up Pick-Up, and administrative roles.

CEO and President Jamie Escoubas addressed funding challenges anticipated in the upcoming fiscal year, noting that most of COA's funding has traditionally come from the Older Americans Act (OAA) at the federal level. She outlined proactive strategies to diversify funding sources, including increased outreach to non-federal and foundation grants. Rachel Jones, Director of Development, expanded on these points by sharing upcoming fundraising events, strategies, and partnership opportunities.

Denise Johnson, Director of Senior Nutrition and Health Services, joined Jamie in highlighting COA's current programs and reinforcing the



organization's mission: to help seniors live well and maintain their independence.

Leigh Galten and Maria Gonzales underscored the critical role of volunteers, calling them a "bright spot during unprecedented times." Leigh shared impressive statistics: in a typical month, over 300 volunteers contribute more than 1,600 hours, saving COA over \$34,000 in staffing costs.

COA also recognized community partners for their ongoing support:

- Becoming Independent delivers meals for 29 MOW routes weekly.
- Dungarvin has committed to five weekly MOW routes.
- Medtronic employees have maintained a MOW route since 2021.
- Windsor Rotary, COA's newest partner, oversees two MOW routes weekly.

Volunteers shared heartfelt reflections on their service, including one individual who has delivered meals for over 18 years.

The event concluded with a kitchen tour and a well-earned standing ovation for the dishwasher—whose workload is so extensive that it takes two people to cover her role during vacations.

If you're interested in making a meaningful difference as a volunteer, log in to COA's portal to learn more about current opportunities at <https://councilonaging.galaxydigital.com> or Leigh Galten at lgalten@councilonaging.com or 707-525-0143 x121.

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New Behavioral Health Resource Map for Sonoma County

This resource map is designed to help you navigate and connect with a variety of behavioral health services and support options available in our community. While not an exhaustive list of all resources, it serves as a helpful starting point to guide you in finding the assistance you need. The map is organized into six key categories: Crisis Support, Behavioral Health, Children and Youth Services, Advocacy and Supportive Services, Cultural Aid, and Housing and Basic Needs. Whether you are seeking immediate help or long-term support, this map provides essential tools to begin your journey toward improved well-being.

<https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/health-and-human-services/health-services/divisions/behavioral-health/resource-map>

A Journey to Healing: Toddy Fitch’s Experience with PEARLS

When you first meet Toddy Fitch, you might be surprised by the depth of her life experiences—her story weaves through loss and unexpected paths. However, the thread that stands out the most is her resilience and journey through life's toughest challenges. Toddy moved to the Bay Area 25 years ago to pursue a career in tech consulting and, later, nannying. But life had other plans. After facing a series of personal losses, including the passing of both her parents, a brother, and a nephew, Toddy found herself in a difficult situation, both emotionally and financially. The combination of these familial losses, being evicted from her Bay Area home of 16 years, the COVID-19 pandemic, and dealing with chronic depression took a significant toll. “I just felt out of control with my life. The move to Sonoma County, although I was relieved to have found affordable housing, was devastating because I felt I was ripped out of my community. My depression made it so I couldn’t make decisions. I just wanted to sleep, and my confidence was gone. Everything felt so overwhelming,” she shared.

During this dark period, Toddy found the strength to reach out for help. She was connected to the Sonoma County Behavioral Health Team, which helped her to become more stable. Toddy was then connected with a Sonoma County case manager, who gave her the information on PEARLS, a short-term program designed to support individuals experiencing depression by breaking down overwhelming tasks into manageable steps, offering emotional support, and providing a sense of accountability. For Toddy, this made all the difference. “What PEARLS did for me

was miraculous. The program sent my coach here, so I didn’t have to get up and go out to meet somebody, which I wouldn’t have been able to do then. The biggest thing that PEARLS did for me was to break things down into small baby steps,” Toddy explained. “When I was depressed, everything felt too big. PEARLS came in, and they helped me set small, achievable goals. They also checked on my mental health every time they came.”

For Toddy, the PEARLS approach meant having someone there to help break things down into achievable steps and someone who created accountability, listened to her concerns, and provided encouragement. She fondly remembers her coach’s gentle and empathetic approach, which allowed her to move forward at her own pace. “My PEARLS coach encouraged me to decide what I could do, what I needed help with, and what steps I felt I could handle. It wasn’t about someone doing it for me; it was about building my confidence again that helped me get through this phase of debilitating depression,” she said.

“At first, we focused on things like finding support for food, where to turn to if you struggle to pay rent, and finding financial aid for my old cat Pearly Girl,” Toddy explained. “It was a



Toddy Fitch

breakthrough because we broke these challenges into baby steps I felt I could do, and then my coach came with helpful resources. By the second or third week, I just thought, ‘Wow! I have different places to call that will help me.’ I would not have known about 95% of the resources she shared.”

Through the PEARLS program, Toddy was also encouraged to increase social, pleasurable, and physical activities. “I decided to start volunteering at a small shop. I met new people and enjoyed conversations. I love it!” She also found the strength to return to her creative passions, picking up watercolor painting again. In addition, Toddy recently found a walking buddy and now walks weekly. Toddy explained, “We walk once a week and plan to increase to two times a week. I’ll tell you, it’s helping me, and my legs feel stronger, too. Besides that, I mainly have someone to chat with, and she’s great.”

Toddy has also appreciated the program’s consistent follow-ups, reminding her that she isn’t alone in her journey. Toddy said. In one of these follow-ups she shared, “After our last sessions, where we worked on how I can get back on my feet and start, I think I will be able to do graphic design again!” Toddy’s testimonial beautifully highlights the power of support, accountability, and taking small steps. Thanks to PEARLS, she has rediscovered the tools needed to embark on her path toward healing and personal growth.

If you or someone you know may be interested in gaining more information about the program, please call (707) 525-0143 ext. 130 or visit councilonaging.com.

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www.emergencyprephelp.org

Community Foundation Sonoma County Grants \$30,000 to Support Senior Meal Programs

By Denise Johnson, Senior Nutrition and Health Director

Council on Aging is pleased to announce that the Community Foundation Sonoma County has awarded a generous \$30,000 grant to support two vital nutrition programs for older adults: Meals on Wheels (MOW) and To-Go Meals.

These programs provide essential nutrition, social connection and safety checks to hundreds of seniors across Sonoma County. MOW delivers directly to homebound, vulnerable older adults, many of whom are isolated and unable to shop or cook for themselves.

In addition to MOW, Council on Aging also operates a To-Go Meals program, offering nutritious, packaged meals for seniors who are mobile but still face food insecurity. Demand for To-Go Meals has grown significantly—currently, 88 older adults are on a waiting list for this service due to limited resources.

The \$30,000 grant is from the Julia L. Grant for Basic Human Needs and will help reduce the waiting list and support ongoing operations, ensuring that more older adults receive the food and support they need to stay healthy and independent. Only 38% of the MOW program is funded by federal dollars. The remaining costs must be met through community donations and grants like this one, making the Foundation’s support both timely and impactful.

This investment demonstrates a shared commitment to protecting the health, dignity, and quality of life of Sonoma County’s aging population. We are deeply grateful to the Community Foundation Sonoma County for recognizing the urgency of this need and taking meaningful action.

To learn more or to contribute to these vital programs, visit www.councilonaging.com.



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