



October 2011

# What is “Family Health”?

October is national “Family Health” month. Just what does that mean to you and your family? What makes a family healthy? Is health just the physical body or is it the mind, the spirit, the values and the environment in which a family resides?

As caregivers for aging family members, we often focus on the physical health of those for whom we care without adequate regard for our own health or the spiritual and physiologic health of the person for whom we care.

What are the components of family health? At the core are heart healthy diets and exercise as well as social and spiritual engagement. I also believe that a smoke free environment and moderation in alcohol use are important.

The above are some of the concrete elements of family health. However, we also need to have periodic screenings for a variety of health issues ranging from osteoporosis to memory loss. I could take the rest of this newsletter listing them - but, the best way to ensure you and your family members have the screenings is to have an annual physical with your family physician. The recommendations for screenings change with age and family history, so remember to ask questions and bring your history to each physician you see.

There are “10 Steps to a Healthy Family”. As discussed below, two of the highest contributors to good health are: “Social Engagement” and “Managing Stress”:

Being socially engaged means you are connected to people and community that give your life meaning and purpose. We all have opportunities to give to others (altruism). Even if we are limited by health issues - we all like to be thanked and to be “needed”. The family member with dementia who folds the laundry feels needed when thanked - even if the folding isn’t perfect!



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Stress is part of life - the secret is to “manage” it. First, you need to label it - to recognize the cause, and then find healthy stress relievers - such as meditation, exercise or just plain “letting go”. Sometimes this means forgiving another even if you feel they have wronged you - harboring anger will affect your health and life negatively.

Many studies show that families who eat together are healthier. Isn’t it interesting when older adults move to communities that have a dining room, some people actually become much healthier? It just is not fun to cook for one or to eat alone. In today’s hectic lifestyle, it is sometimes a challenge to get everyone to the table at the same time. In some families there are “family dinner” nights where everyone makes a commitment to eat together. In the long run, these families will be the ones with less conflict and more respect for each other. It is important that “smart phones” and “iPods” are turned off for this healthy family evening meal ritual.

So, if you live alone, invite someone for dinner once a week. If you are a busy family - find a few days a week that are off limits at the dinner hour. If you have a family member in a retirement community, invite them to your home once a week for a meal. Engage in reminiscing and listen to the stories from their childhood. And don’t forget to have them participate in an activity for which you can extend a “thank you”.

Your environment is important to your

health. Make sure your home is structurally sound to withstand an earthquake and that you have smoke and carbon dioxide alarms to warn you of the unexpected. A home free of lead paint and other environmental toxins (a “green” home) would be best, but is not always possible. Having a home with “peaceful” places or quiet areas inside or outside can add to our well-being.

Those who have a spiritual ritual or religious practice to support transitions, life crises or health challenges are usually the individuals who weather the storms of life and continue to live full lives despite the “pot-holes” in the journey of life. Find something that sustains you and that is bigger than you - nature can be a wonderful place to connect to creation and “awe”.

Being creative for “health” can be a challenge and a Professional Geriatric Care Manager can help you to extend peace and to enhance the quality of life for everyone. If you feel stuck in this process, give us a call. We would be honored to assist or coach you in finding ways to connect to family or community that reduce stress and give peace to your life.

For a complete list of the “10 Steps to a Healthy Family”, call us or email [Info@EldercareAnswers.com](mailto:Info@EldercareAnswers.com).

**Attend The Family Circus II: Walking the Tightrope of Elder Care on Saturday, October 15, 2011 | 8:30 am to 3:00 pm for a day of workshops to empower families with solutions, ideas & knowledge on the challenges of aging. Visit our website for more information:**  
[www.EldercareAnswers.com](http://www.EldercareAnswers.com).

*Eldercare Services provides Counseling, Support Groups, Home Care, and Care Management to aid Family Caregivers. If you or someone you know could benefit from self-care, give us a call at (866) 760-1808 or email us at [Info@EldercareAnswers.com](mailto:Info@EldercareAnswers.com).*

Eldercare Services works with Seniors and their families in Walnut Creek, Alameda County, San Francisco and the Tri-Valley, CA. Visit us on the web at <http://www.EldercareAnswers.com> for more information.

## ***Community Classes***

### **Walnut Creek**

#### **What You Need to Know About Dementia But Were Afraid to Ask**

**3rd Friday of every month from 10 AM to Noon**

1808 Tice Valley Blvd., Walnut Creek, CA 94595

**Class Registration: Please call at least 3 days ahead**

For more information regarding classes and support groups, visit us at [www.EldercareAnswers.com](http://www.EldercareAnswers.com) or call (925) 937-2018, (415) 469-8300 or email us at [info@EldercareAnswers.com](mailto:info@EldercareAnswers.com)

## ***Support Groups***

When concerns for aging family members are part of every day life, or when they interfere with work, your health or other relationships, you need to join a support group.

### **Caring for An Aging Family Member**

**2nd Thursday of every month from 7 to 8:30 PM**

1808 Tice Valley Blvd., Walnut Creek, CA 94595

**1st Tuesday of every month from 6 to 7:30 PM**

605 A Chenery St., San Francisco, CA 94131

**Cost for Support Groups: None**

**Support Group Registration: Not required**



*Eldercare  
Services*  
Advocacy, Care, and Education

**Eldercare Services provides Counseling, Support Groups, Home Care, and Care Management to aid Family Caregivers. If you or someone you know could benefit from self-care, give us a call at (866) 760-1808 or email us at [Info@EldercareAnswers.com](mailto:Info@EldercareAnswers.com).**