

# risk

Winter  
2008

Vol. 8  
issue 4

# reporter

for senior living

A quarterly publication by Church Mutual Insurance Company



## Fitness matters for every age group

Before Rosye Bunch first moved to Melrose Meadows in Iowa City, Iowa, exercise hadn't been part of her daily routine.

"I'd just lost my husband and fallen after a hip replacement," Bunch said. "I'd had three knee replacements, and my main activities were reading and watching TV. I was grieving, and I had no energy."

But that all changed when the 79-year-old moved to Melrose Meadows and met April Marvin, the facility's fitness coordinator.

"It seemed like April would make exercise fun, and I decided to give it a try," Bunch said.

Today, Bunch never misses Marvin's twice-weekly classes that consist of chair and standing exercises.

"I've told April if I'm not here it's because I'm sick or out of town," Bunch said. "Adding exercise has given me more energy and a positive outlook. It's made a big difference in my life."

### The benefits of exercise

Exercise is critical to better health and a higher quality of life for people of all ages, but its impact on the elderly is often ignored and can be especially dramatic.

Encourage your residents to exercise regularly, and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality reports that they can expect physical health benefits in three areas:

- Reduced risk of chronic diseases, such as heart disease
- Better management of high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity and high cholesterol
- Improved physical function, which can be helpful in managing conditions such as osteoarthritis and osteoporosis

Studies also link exercise to a host of other benefits, including lower risks of falls and improved flexibility, energy levels and overall mood.

### Types of exercise to offer

Mayté Ruggiere, health and wellness director at the Peter Blum Family YMCA of Boca Raton, Fla., recommends offering programs that incorporate three exercise categories: endurance, resistance and flexibility/balance.

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"Endurance activities include walking, cycling and dancing—things that get them moving aerobically," Ruggiere said. "Resistance builds muscles and bone density, and flexibility and balance exercises help residents deal with everyday activities like getting in and out of a car or climbing stairs."

**Screen participants**

Residents of virtually every age and ability will benefit from some level of exercise, but it's critical to review their health history and to get approval from their doctor before they begin.

"Older residents often have problems with sight, joint stability, general weakening of the muscles—all things that can impact balance and agility—and cardiac health," said Sue Norris, wellness and activity coordinator at Melrose Meadows. "We work in partnership with their health care professional to help them exercise safely and effectively."

**Encourage residents to "listen"**

Both Ruggiere and Norris stress the importance of helping residents exercise at the pace that's right for them.

"Our biggest rule is for residents to know their own body and rest when they need to," Norris said.

"Instead of taking a heart rate (a traditional monitoring tool), we use an exertion scale of one to ten," Ruggiere said. "Our participants know that if they can still speak and catch their breath, then they're where they should be."

Instructors should keep an eye on facial expressions and body language for signs that a resident needs to slow down or is struggling with an exercise.

"A skilled instructor will be able to offer alternatives for each exercise so that residents of all ability levels can participate," Norris said.

**The benefits of group exercise**

Group exercise adds a social aspect and can help to encourage participation and achievement.

"Groups help to develop camaraderie and friendships, and they give an added impetus to work a bit harder," Ruggiere said. "If you see that your neighbor, with their limitations, is able to exercise, you might be more willing to give it a try too."

When offering group exercise programs, limit group size to 20—larger groups are harder to monitor and make it more difficult to build connections.

**Inexpensive exercise tools**

Walking works well for a variety of ages and abilities, can be done both indoors or out and doesn't require any special equipment. Resistance exercises can be done with inexpensive rubber tubing available at many retailers. Ruggiere recommends the kind with handles.

Small dumbbells and oversized exercise balls that residents

sit and balance on are other good options.

"The balls are great for exercising core muscles in the stomach, back and pelvic regions and are excellent for building stability and strength," Norris said.

**Encouraging participation**

Keep it fun, simple and fresh. Melrose Meadows joined in the "Lighten Up Iowa" program with teams who were given points for a wide variety of physical activities. The facility also held the "Melrose Olympics"—complete with ceremony and medals—hosted a hydration party with a variety of healthy beverages and unusual fruits and had a treadmill marathon.

"We're always looking for new ways to create buzz," Norris said.

**Finding the right staff**

Instructors don't need a degree in sports or a physiology-related field, but they do need a basic understanding of safety concerns and body function. A general group fitness certification is a good idea, and there are many workshops and courses available that are geared toward senior exercise programs.

**Don't let kids have all the fun!  
Discover the benefits of "Wii"**

If you haven't heard of the Nintendo "Wii" (pronounced "we"), ask your favorite 12-year-old to fill you in. This popular video game lets users "play" their favorite sport in the comfort of their living room. It uses a motion-sensitive controller that looks like a TV remote, and each player mimics the motions of the sport while watching the results of their actions on a TV screen.

Wii is rapidly becoming a favorite in assisted living facilities.

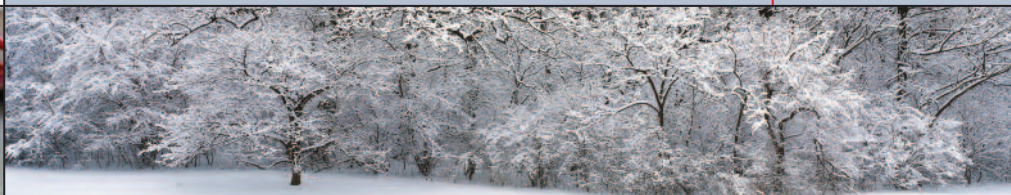
"A group of us was looking at toy samples for our grandchildren, and we ended up playing golf until 10:30 at night," said Flora Dierbach, a resident and the chairperson of entertainment at the Sedgebrook Retirement Community in Lincolnshire, Ill.

Dierbach quickly realized the exercise benefits of Wii and encouraged her facility to buy one. She launched a bowling tournament that eventually grew to include multiple facilities.

"We love it, and people of all abilities are using it. We've got people who are bowling from chairs, and even a woman with a walker and an oxygen tank uses it," Dierbach said.

**Resources**

- The National Institute on Aging has a number of free guides as well as a 48-minute exercise video/DVD for \$7. [www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation](http://www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation)
- American College of Sports Medicine [www.acsm.org](http://www.acsm.org)
- Small Step has tips for healthier lifestyles. [www.smallstep.gov](http://www.smallstep.gov)



# seasonal spotlight **winter**

## Hazardous jobs

There are many jobs performed at senior living facilities that include hazards. But that doesn't mean those tasks need to be unsafe.

Using chemicals for cleaning, assisting residents into and out of chairs, using knives in the kitchen and a host of other jobs fit in to the category of injury-causing duties.

However, facilities that take the time to identify the risks and then develop and implement risk control measures to handle those risks see fewer injuries to workers, which equates to fewer days away from work.

There are common traits of facilities that are truly safety conscious. If your facility does not follow these steps, ask yourself why not?

- Treat near misses as red flags

Don't brush off a near miss without learning from it. Treat a near miss with the same seriousness you would an accident. Take the necessary steps to prevent the incident from happening again.

- Track and trend

If you don't keep records of incidents and near misses, you can't analyze the data to spot trouble areas. There are many software programs available to help you with this project.

- No-punishment culture

Encourage your employees to report near misses and minor incidents by positive reinforcement. Don't kill the messenger.

- Management support

Safety needs to be encouraged from the top down. Encourage employees to participate in courses and workshops to enhance the safety of your operations.

- Involve all staff

Interview all parties involved in or witnesses to a near miss or incident. Analyze all the information gathered and make appropriate adjustments.

**Richard J. Schaber, CPCU**  
Risk Control Manager

## Keep cool this summer with a spring HVAC tuneup

Though you might be reading this with your thermostat turned to "heat" and a sweater at the ready, it's not too early to start thinking ahead to summer when it comes to your heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system.

"I tell people to have their air conditioning checked by April," said Robert Shaw, operations manager for EMCOR Services Midwest, an HVAC specialist in Elmhurst, Ill. "That way you won't have any surprises on the first hot day."

## Spring checklist

Shaw recommends that a spring tuneup include the following:

- Filter and belt change
- Check of contactors and compressor
- Cleaning of condensers
- Check and adjustment of thermostat

"Change your filters at least quarterly," Shaw said. "If you have a vulnerable population or one that suffers from allergies, I'd change the filter monthly."

Shaw also recommends proactively changing belts (on belt-driven systems).

## Don't forget efficiency

Although your system might appear to be operating smoothly, Shaw cautions facilities to take a close look at its actual efficiency.

"If your system is only 30 percent efficient, your energy costs are much higher than they need to be," he said. "An initial investment in a new system is often paid back within a few years because of the increased efficiency."

It's a good idea to monitor a system's efficiency once it hits about 15 years in age.

## The secret to a comfortable building

Once your system is inspected and running smoothly, borrow this trick from Shaw: turn on the fan.

"If you run your fan 24/7, you'll have to replace your filters more frequently, but you'll improve the air quality and also moderate temperatures throughout the facility," he said. "Constantly flowing air helps to eliminate hot and cold spots throughout the building, and the cost to run the fan is very low."

## Finding the right HVAC contractor

Although some tasks can typically be handled by facility staff—like changing filters or checking the thermostat—it's generally a good idea to use a trained professional to monitor your HVAC system.

"Create partnerships with your contractor instead of looking for the lowest rate at each check," Shaw said. "It's the best way to ensure efficiency and low costs in the long run."

# Q | a

## A Perspective

*Feeding elderly residents can be a challenge. Many have limited appetites, caused by everything from medication to depression to slower digestive systems.*

*Others have difficulty chewing or swallowing or restricted diets that can make meals less appetizing. But it's critical to find effective ways to ensure that residents have proper nutrition on a daily basis.*

*According to a study by the Linus Pauling Institute at Oregon State University, almost half of the elderly people in*



*developed countries have inadequate nutritional intake, and the impact of a host of diseases might be slowed with proper nutrition.*

*Gayle Wookey, a registered nurse and the administrator at the Fay Wookey Memorial Assisted Living Center in Clark, S.D., shares her tips for healthy resident nutrition.*

### **Risk Reporter: How can a facility ensure that it's offering residents a proper diet?**

**G. Wookey:** We've found that the best way is to use a registered dietician (RD). To keep costs down, we contract for the services of a dietician through the local hospital. Having access to her expertise allows us to meet all residents' dietary needs—both those on standard diets and those who have special needs—because of conditions such as diabetes, congestive heart failure and kidney problems.

### **Risk Reporter: Walk me through the process of assessing a resident's dietary needs.**

**G. Wookey:** When a new resident comes to us, our RD does a thorough assessment. She looks at the information from his/her most recent doctor's visit and his/her weight history. She assesses his/her dental health, which helps her to ascertain the types of food the resident is able to eat and learns about allergies and food preferences.

### **Risk Reporter: How do you meet special dietary needs?**

**G. Wookey:** We start with one basic menu that's made with no added salt—this helps us to accommodate residents with congestive heart failure. We create menus that are well balanced both in terms of the nutritional variety in each meal and the overall nutritional content for a given day. Then we use education to help our residents make healthy choices that reflect their individual dietary needs. For instance, our diabetic residents know which foods are carbohydrates and how many they can have in a day, and we've taught them what a true portion size is for various foods.

### **Risk Reporter: It sounds like your residents have a lot of control over what they eat.**

**G. Wookey:** Meals are the highlight of the day for many of our residents, so we do everything we can to help them enjoy their food. We give them a say in what they eat by asking for their suggestions on menus and always having healthy snacks available throughout the day. At meals, we serve food family style so that residents can take what they want instead of feeling overwhelmed by a large portion. Our goal is to keep our setting as similar to what they might have enjoyed at home as possible.

### **Risk Reporter: How do you ensure that residents are getting a balanced diet—especially those with special health concerns?**

**G. Wookey:** The staff uses a daily report sheet to record what residents eat at meals and how much. Those with diabetes have their blood sugars checked, and we weigh residents with congestive heart failure to monitor for buildup of fluid. We do educational programs about four times a year to ensure that residents have the information to make good choices. If we know a resident isn't eating enough at meal times, we encourage them to have healthy snacks. Under some circumstances, our dietician might add a supplement to a resident's diet.