

SPRING 2017

boomers

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Gardening can feed your
soul and your body



By Melissa Erickson
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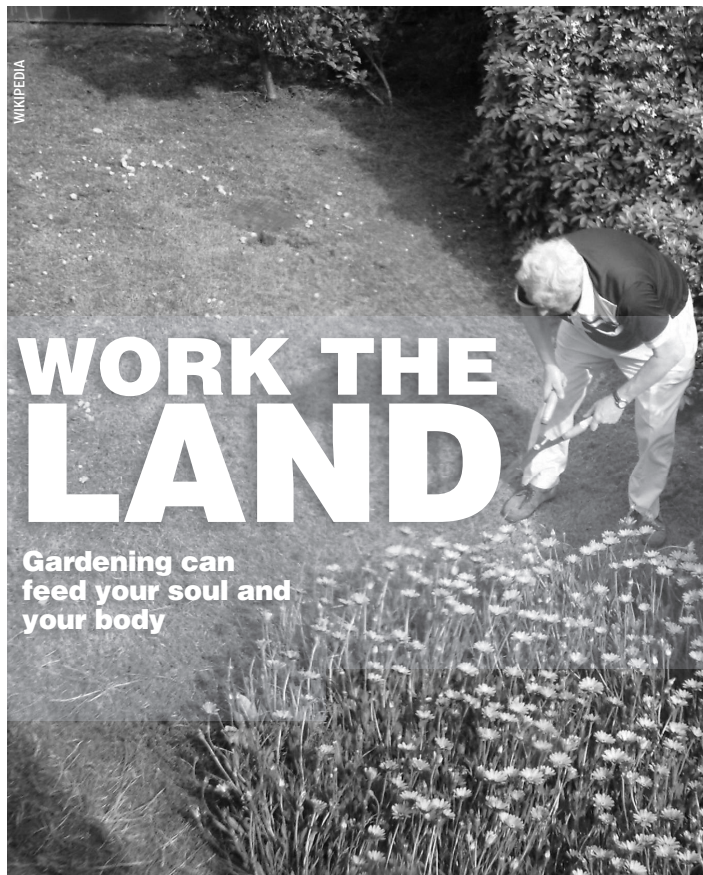
Does the idea of running or trying the latest fitness craze make you simply say no? If a pricey gym membership is not for you, there are other ways to keep healthy and stay in shape. Spring is a great time to get outdoors and get working in your yard or garden.

"Absolutely, gardening or yard work is a great form of exercise," said Dr. Nicholas A. DiNubile, an orthopaedic surgeon specializing in sports medicine in Havertown, Pennsylvania, and the author of the "FrameWork" series of books. "Anything you do to avoid sedentary behavior is good, and if you increase your physical work that's even better."

Getting outside and soaking up vitamin D, which contributes to bone and joint health by helping your body absorb calcium, is a bonus, said DiNubile, vice president of the American Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine.

A real workout

It's a myth that all older folks want to downsize to a condo and hand over the care of personal green space. Two-thirds of boomers want a yard or garden, and they see working outside as an enjoyable pastime, according to research done by The Demand Institute. Baby boomers were responsible for 42 percent of the purchases in the \$26.6 billion lawn and garden market last year, according to the National Garden Bureau.



WORK THE LAND

Gardening can feed your soul and your body

"Gardening and yard work can be a total-body routine. It can work the upper body, core and legs depending on what you're doing. In general if you're sweating, you're taxing your body."

DR. NICHOLAS A. DINUBILE

"You don't have to do sit-ups or push-ups or work out on an elliptical machine to get the benefits of exercise," DiNubile said. "Weeding, digging, raking, mowing can be taxing and demanding on the body and just as active as traditional exercise."

Gardening and yard work can help improve strength, endurance and flexibility and help to reduce the risk of high blood pressure, heart disease,

diabetes, obesity and other medical conditions.

"Gardening and yard work can be a total-body routine. It can work the upper body, core and legs depending on what you're doing. In general if you're sweating, you're taxing your body," DiNubile said.

If you're using a small hand trowel and scattering a few seeds, "that's not much exercise," DiNubile said. "If you're pulling or yanking weeds in a

large area or digging with a real shovel, that's on par with manual labor."

According to AXA PPP Healthcare:

- Planting flowers can burn 200-400 calories per hour.
- Weeding the lawn can burn 200-400 calories per hour.
- Mowing the lawn can burn 250-350 calories per hour.
- Watering the garden can burn 120 calories per hour.
- Heavy landscaping can burn 400-600 calories per hour.
- Cleaning the garden can burn 400 calories per hour.

Interested in what kind of a workout you're getting? Strap on a fitness monitor that will track your steps and heart rate, DiNubile said.

Prepare yourself

It's not advised that a novice exerciser cancel their lawn service without checking with a doctor to see if they're healthy enough to roll up their sleeves and get to work.

"As we get older the discs in our backs get beat up, knee muscles get worn and can tear," DiNubile said. Operating the pull start on a lawnmower can strain or tear a rotator cuff, so be cautious, he said.

Also be sure to wear sunscreen and protective clothing when outdoors, and stretch before getting to work.

"Start slowly and add a little more each day. Unfortunately our bodies don't have a red caution light like cars do to tell you when you've done too much," DiNubile said. "If you wake up a little sore, don't give up. Your body will get used to the new demands."



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Ways to save on PRESCRIPTION DRUGS



By Melissa Erickson
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Prescription drug prices are skyrocketing, especially for older Americans. A new AARP report found that prices for brand-name drugs widely used by boomers increased nearly 130 times the rate of inflation in 2015, for an average increase of 15.5 percent.

That's the fourth straight year of double-digit average annual price increases for widely used prescriptions.

"Prescription drug therapy is not affordable when its cost exceeds the patient's entire income," said Leigh Purvis, director of health services research, AARP Public Policy Institute, and co-author of the report. "Even if patients are fortunate enough to have good health-care coverage, high prescription drug costs translate into higher out-of-pocket costs — especially for those who pay a percentage of drug costs rather than a fixed copayment — as well as higher premiums, de-

ductibles and other forms of cost-sharing."

Purvis answered some questions about where and how to get cheaper drugs:

Q: Do prescription prices vary by where a person lives or what store they're bought at?

A: Yes, there is a great deal of variation in prescription drug prices. For example, one pharmacy may have a very different price than another pharmacy located just across the street. Some states have developed websites that allow you to make those types of price comparisons. There are also a growing number of apps and online tools that allow you to make drug price comparisons, found easily with a Google search.

Q: Can people ask for a discount on their prescription?

A: Absolutely, although it's worth noting that a pharmacy's willingness to give you a discount may depend on your health-care coverage. Some pharmacies are hesitant to offer discounts to Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries due to concerns about federal laws

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**LEIGH PURVIS,
AARP PUBLIC
POLICY
INSTITUTE**

that prohibit health-care providers from offering anything that could be seen as kick-backs.

Q: What about discount clubs? They may have a fee to join. Is it worth it?

A: It really depends on your individual circumstances. Discount clubs can provide some savings, particularly if you take generic drugs. However, you should keep in mind that you can't use discount club cards in combination with your health insurance. And yes, you should definitely be mindful that the membership fee could make such programs less of a deal.

Q: Is choosing generics a good way to cut costs?

A: We strongly recommend that consumers take every opportunity to use less-expensive, equally effective generic drugs. Generics are required to have the same active ingredient, strength, dosage form and route of administration as their brand-name counterparts. Choosing to use a generic equivalent is an easy way to save a lot of money.

Q: Anything to watch out for if shopping online?

A: Unfortunately, there are some bad actors out there, so you should make sure that you're purchasing your drugs from a reputable source. One option is to look for online pharmacies that have been certified by LegitScript.com or through a program called Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites (VIPPS). Both are affiliated with the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy. Another option is to look for online pharmacies that have walk-in stores in the United States, such as CVS and Walgreens.

Q: Anything else readers should know?

A: Yet another savings option comes from the drug manufacturers themselves. Many brand-name drug manufacturers have programs that offer their products at greatly reduced prices or even for free for patients who meet their eligibility criteria. However, it's always a good idea to make sure that a generic equivalent isn't available before pursuing this option.

By Melissa Erickson
More Content Now

The pills you're taking to keep you healthy have a chance of making you sick. That's because people taking a multitude of medications are risking potentially dangerous drug interactions or could be limiting their effectiveness.

"The more drugs you take, the more chances you have to experience a bad reaction," said Dr. Milta Little, associate professor of geriatrics at Saint Louis University. "Drugs may not play well with each other, and problems can snowball for older adults who take five or more medicines."

As people grow older, they can develop a litany of health problems and see multiple specialists who prescribe various drugs to treat common conditions such as osteoporosis, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, arthritis and memory loss. These can be in addition to over-the-counter medications, herbal supplements and vitamins one is taking at home.

Polypharmacy

Polypharmacy is defined as taking five or more medications at the same time and is most common in older adults, Little said.

"As a geriatrician who quarterback the health care of my patients, I think six medicines usually is too many, and studies have shown mortality is higher

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TIPS TO AVOID DRUG INTERACTIONS

among patients who are taking 10 medicines," she said. "I love to analyze medicines my patients are taking because reducing the number of drugs often makes them feel so much better. Many times, less is more."

It is not uncommon for Little to see patients who are on 20 to 30 medicines including supplements.

"They think each medicine is doing good, but when you pile on the chemicals you increase the risk of a bad reaction," Little said. "Because people are unique,

one-size-fits-all guidelines don't work. One 65-year-old man might look 45 while another appears much older. There's a little bit of art to medicine."

Instead, Little advocates an annual medicine checkup, where patients ask doctors to assess the drugs they are taking, being mindful that vitamins, supplements and over-the-counter medicines count, too.

"It's critical that you're your own medical advocate and that you know how your body reacts to medicines," Little said.

Here are some good questions to ask and things to bring to your next physical:

- Keep a current list of medicines and dosages and bring it to discuss with your doctor.
- Ask your doctor if you still need to be taking every medication. "Push back if they say, 'Yes.' Ask, 'Why? What is it being used for and how will it help me?'" Little said.
- Understand what you're taking. "If you have literacy or memory problems, bring someone with who can help," Little said.
- Use only one pharmacy to fill prescriptions.
- Read and understand labels.

Know the side effects

A medicine might address one problem but create another. For instance, antidepressants can cause frequent urination, which can lead to incontinence. Statins and blood thinners worsen frailty, which makes patients vulnerable to more medical problems. An antidiuretic for blood pressure can worsen symptoms of gout, which is a form of arthritis.

"Some older adults believe taking a pill will make them healthier, which is not always the case, particularly when they're taking many pills for different health issues. Too many medicines can make older adults feel fatigued and undermine the quality of their lives," Little said. "We have a lot of evidence that non-medical treatments, such as exercise, yoga and massages, work better in improving a person's health."

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TIME FOR BED

We know sleep is important – tips for getting more

By Melissa Erickson
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Good sleep is essential not only for physical health but also for our brain health. To keep mentally sharp as we age, experts recommend getting seven to eight hours of sleep per day, something many people don't adhere to.

"Sleep is very important. People who sleep less than six hours on average show decreased cognitive function. Their reaction times are slower, and they have more trouble paying attention and multitasking," said Dr. Robert S. Rosenberg, board certified sleep medicine physician and author of "The Doctor's Guide to Sleep Solutions for Stress & Anxiety."

"Sleep is very important for brain health. It is during sleep that our brain's glymphatic system removes toxins such as beta amyloid that can cause Alzheimer's," Rosenberg said.

Boomers and sleep

A recent AARP report found that 99 percent of adults older than 50 believe that sleep is important for their brain health, but over four in 10 (43 percent) say they don't get enough sleep. More than half (54 percent) of adults report they wake up too early in the morning and can't get back to sleep.

As we age, our sleep patterns change.

"We demonstrate less deep (slow-wave sleep) and increased amounts of lighter stages of sleep," Rosenberg said. "Dream, or REM, sleep stays about the same. We also have more frequent brief awakenings from sleep. We may have more trouble falling asleep and staying asleep, the former due to decreased production of melatonin and weakening of circadian rhythms, the latter in part due to more chronic pain and other medical conditions such as pulmonary and cardiac disorders, which interfere with sleep."

Sleep hygiene

One of the key ways to get better sleep is to practice good sleep hygiene.

"Establish a set sleep/wake schedule and stick to it. Turn off all blue-light-emitting devices such as computers and cellphones one hour before bedtime. Avoid alcohol close to bedtime, and stop caffeine intake at least six hours before bedtime. Make sure your bedroom environment is comfortable and dark," Rosenberg said.

Global Council on Brain Health, an independent collaborative of scientists, doctors and academics, recently came out with new recommendations that cover a wide range of sleep-related issues, including common factors that can disrupt sleep, symptoms of potential sleep disorders, and prescription medications and over-the-counter sleep aids. Here are a few of their tips on falling and staying asleep:

- Don't stay in bed if you are not sleepy. Leave the bedroom if you are in bed awake longer than you would like to be. Find a quiet place to relax outside of the bedroom and return to bed only once you feel sleepy.
- Limiting your time in bed may improve the quality of sleep. For example, if you are sleeping seven hours, you should only be in bed seven-and-a-half hours, not nine to 10 hours.
- A regular warm bath may be beneficial two to three hours before bedtime.
- Wearing socks to bed may be beneficial if you have cold feet.
- Avoid difficult discussions or arguing in the evening.
- If you worry a lot while in bed, schedule about 15 minutes each morning as your "worry time" specifically for intentional concentrating on the things you think about at night; this may make nocturnal worrying less.
- Try relaxation therapies with deep breathing and meditation, as these help some to fall

and stay asleep.

- Identify your most comfortable position and sleep environment by investigating how you lie most comfortably in bed (try different positions and pillows).
- Avoid long naps; if you must nap, limit to 30 minutes in the early afternoon.
- It's possible that you are getting more sleep than you think, but it is still worth consulting with your health-care provider if your life is being negatively impacted by lack of sleep.

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