



Healthy Transitions is Northwestern Memorial Hospital's award-winning marketing publication for seniors

The Changing Face of Aging

To age successfully, take charge of your life!

Ideas about aging in America are evolving, according to recent research findings. Americans are living longer and healthier lives than was predicted a decade or two ago, say scientists who study how long people can live and the quality of life they enjoy. Older adults' self-perceptions also are changing, and many are reinventing aging by exploring new skills and adventures and remaining active in myriad ways.

A report recently issued by the Bureau of the Census, "65+ in the United States," points out that poor health is not as prevalent as many assume, especially among the "young old." Among noninstitutionalized persons in 1992, three in four aged 65 to 74 considered their health to be good, very good or excellent, as do about two in three aged 75 and over.

The Census Bureau also reports that women have become increasingly important in America's workplaces: Their share of the older labor force – 55 years

and older – increased from 23 percent in 1950 to 44 percent in 1993.

Two experts on aging associated with Northwestern Memorial Hospital and Northwestern University reinforce the Census Bureau's positive findings. James Webster Jr., MD, medical coordinator of geriatric programs at Northwestern Memorial Hospital and director of the Buehler Center on Aging, McGaw Medical Center, Northwestern University, and Celia Berdes, MSPH, one of the associate directors of the Buehler Center on Aging, are dedicated to improving the quality of life of older adults.

Dr. Webster concurs with most experts on aging that the geriatric population's improved health is attributed to better education and an increased emphasis on wellness and disease prevention. The role of education is underscored for two reasons: Those who continue to read and engage in other stimulating activities as they age may be



*More than ever before...
the world is your oyster.*



At 77, John Glenn Continues to Contribute

At age 77, in the fall of this year, Democratic senator and former astronaut John Glenn will return to space to help scientists study the problematic effects of aging, which also are observed in astronauts in their weightless state. One of the first major accomplishments of a 10-year collaboration between the National Institute on Aging and the National Air and Space Agency (NASA), Glenn's nine-day mission will include an experiment designed to study sleep cycles and the use of the popular but still unproven sleep aid, melatonin. A series of experiments also will study loss of balance, bone mineral loss, weakening of the heart muscle and muscle deterioration.



less susceptible to cognitive impairments, and better-educated people are more likely to reduce or quit the kinds of risky behaviors that can shorten their lives.

Dr. Webster explains that during the first half of one's life, good health largely is determined by genetics. In later life, lifestyle factors are far more significant. "That means all the stuff your grandmother told you is true," says Dr. Webster. "Eat right, don't smoke, drink only in moderation, get fresh air and exercise, pay attention to your health and wear your seat belt and sensible shoes."

Dr. Webster's common-sense advice adds an interesting dimension to the complex statistical data that funnels through the Buehler Center on Aging. One of only a few such organizations in the country, the Buehler Center's mission is to promote the development of gerontology and geriatrics education, research and clinical services for older adults. The center works primarily with healthcare professionals.

Buehler Center associate director Celia Berdes says recent groundbreaking studies conducted by gerontology researchers around the world are helping to debunk some long-standing, although incorrect, beliefs about how



Elizebeth Robinson Travels Far and Wide in Pursuit of a Dream

Next year, when *Healthy Transitions* cover subject Elizebeth Robinson journeys to Australia, she will have fulfilled her dream of exploring every continent. This 65-year-old believes in living life to the fullest because, with the wisdom that often accompanies older age, she has learned to value the promise of every day. Robinson travels alone and offers this

advice to others: "Consider safety first. Read the travel section of the newspaper so you'll learn about what's going on around the world. Use a travel agent, because they give you good advice and help you get the best seats when you fly."

people age. An important one was the disengagement theory, asserting that older adults become isolated from others as they age. A more recent although unrelated theory, says Berdes, "reasons that many people transcend the aging process by using their life experiences to enrich themselves and cope

more effectively with life's difficulties, such as illnesses."

Gerontology is a topic of increasing interest, says Berdes. Recent or ongoing areas of study by Buehler Center researchers cover a rich array of subjects, from "Creativity in the Second Half of Life," a study by Buehler Center associate director Madelyn Iris, PhD, to Berdes' "Quality of Care and Quality of Life in Nursing Homes."

The number of people over the age of 85 is increasing more quickly than the number of their counterparts in any other segment. But statistics alone reveal nothing about quality of life, and that's the issue that's meaningful. So put statistics aside, and consider this thoughtful question from Celia Berdes to determine how well you are aging: "Are you making the most of what you have to offer?"

What Wisdom Can You Offer to Researchers on Aging?

One of the Buehler Center's ongoing efforts is the Aging Research Registry, created to help researchers connect with potential volunteers, age 60 and older, who are interested in participating in a variety of aging-related research projects at Northwestern University. The goal is to develop new knowledge about the aging process, the nature and quality of care for older adults and our aging society.

Those who join the Aging Research Registry may agree or decline to participate in any research for which they are contacted. Projects using the Aging Research Registry have passed the ethics review of the Northwestern University Institutional Review Board, and all data are kept confidential.

If you would like more information about joining the registry, call the Buehler Center on Aging at 312/503-3087 to request an enrollment form.