

WELLNESS CONNECTION

LIVE WELL. WORK WELL.

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EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT - Wellness Connection Interview with Karla Belzer



By Seth Yoder

Seth Yoder from the Wellness Connection recently sat down with Karla Belzer to discuss healthy habits we can incorporate in our lives as we age. Karla is a Family Life Educator on the Family and Consumer Sciences team serving the Carroll, Lee, and Whiteside counties in northwest Illinois. Karla has been with the University of Illinois Extension Office for five years.

Q. What types of activities do you recommend as we age, and is there a recommended amount of time to work out each week?

A. Exercise is something we all should incorporate in our daily lives whether we are young or old. No matter how old you are the key to success when it comes to exercise is choosing an activity you enjoy. This will help you maintain your motivation even on those mornings when you don't want to get out of bed. Everyone should aim for approximately 150 minutes of activities a week and should include aerobic exercise and sensible weight training. It is also recommended to include at least two days of balancing and stretching exercises. If you don't find activities like jogging, biking, or swimming enjoyable, keep in mind that simply going for a walk at your regular pace has been found to be more beneficial than not doing anything.

Q. What types of foods would you recommend and discourage as we age?

A. I would encourage anyone to consider a heart healthy diet as it contributes to your overall brain health. A heart healthy diet includes lean meats, low-fat dairy, healthy fats (vegetable oils, nuts,

fish), omega-3 fatty acids (salmon, tuna, shrimp, walnuts) and antioxidant rich foods (berries, citrus, dark leafy greens, carrots, dried beans, etc.). As we age it's also important to avoid added sodium and sugar to prevent inflammation, drink alcohol in moderation, and stay hydrated.

Q. What types of activities will help strengthen cognitive functions as we age?

A. Current research indicates that challenging the brain is also something you can do to contribute to your own brain health. Similar to exercise, when choosing intellectually challenging activities, it is important to consider your level of interest before diving in. For example, if you've never had an interest in reading "War and Peace," chances are this is not the type of activity you should choose to challenge your brain.

Another thing to keep in mind is that there is a difference between a mental activity and a mental challenge, just as there is a difference between physical activity and physical challenge. Washing the dishes is a physical activity, while biking three times a week may be a physical challenge. Watching the birds fly is more of a mental activity but researching birds that are native to your area may be more of a mental challenge.

If you've become very good at a chosen activity, take it up a notch to make it more challenging. For instance, if you are a wonderful knitter and can make a blanket in no time at all, try learning a new stitch or pattern, or making something more difficult, like a sweater.

Q. What types of preventative health care would you recommend as we age?

A. It is important to keep up with your yearly physical, dental, and eye exams. It is also recommended to stay up to date with immunizations. The following screenings are also recommended:

- Blood pressure and cholesterol
- Breast cancer
- Cervical cancer
- Colorectal cancer
- Diabetes screening

It is important to consult your physician before requesting any of these screenings. For further information please refer to the following articles for [men](#) and [women](#) between the ages of 40-64.

Q. Out of everything you have recommended is there one thing that is most important to pay attention to as we age or is it more a combination of everything that will help us age gracefully?

A. It's best to not focus solely on any one lifestyle factor. Everything we've discussed should be done in combination for optimum benefits.

Some important characteristics of aging well are:

- Maintain a positive or optimistic attitude
 - Be around those that are supportive
 - Laugh
 - Manage stress
 - Practice positive self-talk
 - Practice gratitude
 - Remain socially active
 - Do something meaningful
 - Pursue a passion
 - Do at least one thing you enjoy each day
 - Engage in a community of support (church, faith community, community group)
 - Live with purpose
 - Use your gifts, passions and values
 - Give of your time, talent, and treasure
 - Eat well
 - Eat a heart healthy diet
 - Remain physically active
 - Engage in intellectual challenges
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