

6-week Ambassador classes offer folks ways to embark upon healthy aging



There are many lifetime events that bring a family together. Whether it is a wedding, a birthday or other milestones, there is always one element that is involved — food.

Food has been a common source of comfort for people going back several generations. During an interview with Center for Healthy Aging's Certified Community Health Ambassador Valerie Bullock, she

recalled that during her southern upbringing food was the answer to all problems.

Valerie mentioned that food was a solution to many different emotions such as sadness, happiness and illness. Not only did she recall food being a common source of comfort, but she also discussed how physical activity was incorporated into their everyday lives.

Eating properly and exercising are just two prevention activities that can lead to a healthier lifestyle. When Valerie was growing up, physical activity was a means of entertainment. She recalled that her childhood commonly consisted of playing outside for long periods of time as opposed to today where kids are commonly entertained by computers, televisions and videogames.

Even though food and physical activity played important roles in the lives of many people, overall health was often overlooked. As Valerie discussed, people only visited the doctor when they were sick and rarely had routine check ups and screenings. As a result, many people didn't realize that prevention of illnesses and diseases could have been possible.

Valerie, knowing that health is always an issue in her and her family's lives, decided to participate in the CHA's Community Health Ambassador six-week program. The program focuses on the "Ten Keys"™ to Healthy Aging — Lower Systolic Blood Pressure, Stop Smoking, Participate in Cancer Screenings, Get Immunized Regularly, Regulate Blood Glucose, Lower LDL Cholesterol, Be Physically Active, Prevent Bone Loss and Muscle Weakness, Maintain Social Contact and Combat Depression.

While attending the Ambassador program Valerie felt relaxed and enjoyed how the class was organized. She felt that the interactions of the instructors and the students as well as the open discussions were helpful. Valerie also reflected that the "10 Keys"™ program encouraged positive change in the students.

For example, she committed to walking everyday and limited her snacking. She incorporated the "Ten Keys"™ to Healthy Aging into the



Lemington Senior Center where she works. She feels strongly that the "Ten Keys"™ Ambassador Program prepared her to teach one key per month at her Community Center with confidence. The program provided her with knowledge that she could use for any of her own personal health challenges in the future.

It is a common thought that many health issues are due to aging but as Valerie mentioned "No, not necessarily. If it was age related, then everyone would have it." Valerie feels that aging does not have to be a bad thing. Many of the participants in her "Ten Keys"™ monthly class have also began participating in the Silver Sneakers Fitness Program at her Community Center which encourages physical activity.

She does not limit her knowledge of healthy aging to just the classes she teaches, she uses the information everyday. "I present the information to at least make them think," she said.

People may not always want to openly speak about health related issues but at least Community Health Ambassadors are spreading the message of the "Ten Keys."™ The "Ten Keys"™ to Healthy Aging may improve your quality of life and could lead you to a Healthier Tomorrow.

This article was written by Alicia Owens and Melissa Woodal, Student Interns at the Center for Healthy Aging. CHA is a part of the Department of Epidemiology, in the Graduate School of Public Health, at the University of Pittsburgh. It is one of 33 Prevention Research Centers in the United States funded by the Centers for Disease Control.

For questions or more information contact David J. Fetterman, Community Outreach Coordinator & Director of Education at the CHA, 412-383-3121 or visit our website at www.healthyaging.pitt.edu

The following are the locations for upcoming Ambassador classes:

- Boyce Campus, Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC), 595 Beattie Road, Monroeville
- North Hills Campus, Community College of Allegheny County, 8701 Perry Highway, Pittsburgh
- South Campus, Community College of Allegheny County, 1750 Clairton Road (Route 885), West Mifflin
- Center for Healthy Aging, University of Pittsburgh, 130 N. Bellefield Ave., Pittsburgh
- UPMC McKeesport, Kelly Building, 600 Hospital Way, McKeesport
- Osher Lifelong Learning Center (must be a member of Osher), Cathedral of Learning, University of Pittsburgh

Classes are offered every February, June, and September. Contact 866-350-6509 to register for a location near you.