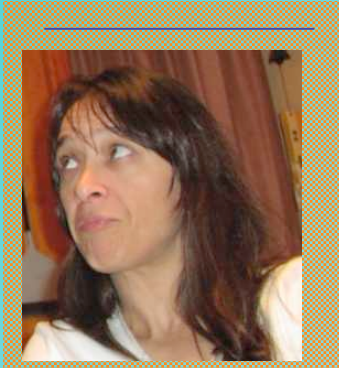


American Indian Elders: Medical Considerations

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The doctor is in.

"Somehow, we can't see a lot of Spirit Lake grandmothers doing sit-ups and jogging in place along with Jane Fonda."

Vocational rehabilitation is about helping people get and keep jobs. Medicine is about helping people get and keep healthy. Thus, the two would seem to go hand in hand. After all, you can't work very well when you're sick. There are several health needs that are particularly important to older American Indian adults, and, in this issue, we'd like to make you more aware of some less well-recognized of these needs.

EXERCISE! Did you know that physical inactivity has a higher correlation with coronary heart disease than smoking, obesity or high blood pressure? American Indians tend to get less exercise than non-Indians and this trend is worse the older one gets. Now, we know the Fort Totten Country Club with the two golf courses and tennis courts hasn't opened yet! Somehow, we can't see a lot of Spirit Lake grandmothers doing sit-ups and jogging in place along with Jane Fonda or Richard Simmons. If you do, good for you, but you probably are the exception. Here are a few practical suggestions.

Start slow. If you have not exercised for years, you are not going to get back in top shape in a week or two. If you don't normally walk more than to your car and inside the casino, start walking a half-mile each day.

Be consistent. Exercise a little every day. If you start with something like walking a half-mile, it won't take you more than fifteen minutes. Once you

get it into your regular routine, it becomes a habit. All of you smokers know how hard habits can be to break.

Try to make it pleasant. We recommend walking because it requires no special equipment, no cost and you can do it anywhere. We highly recommend walking with your children or grandchildren some of the time. It is good for you and your younger family members to have the opportunity to talk to one another or just be together. Walking alone sometimes can also give you the opportunity just to be alone with your thoughts.

Once you have gotten more accustomed to exercise, try to increase the amount gradually. You could start walking a mile each day, maybe join an exercise class through the Diabetes Fitness program or try swimming at the Spirit Lake Resort.

TAKE YOUR MEDICINE! There are lots of reasons people give for not taking their medicine, some of them more common in low-income and rural populations.

"But, doctor, I couldn't get to town and I was running out so I only took half what you ordered at a time."

"It was so expensive and I figured I didn't really need that much, so I took two pills a day instead of three. It lasts longer that way."

"I was feeling better so I quit taking it."
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Let's deal with these excuses one at a time. (1) Because you could not get a ride to town does not mean you don't need your medicine. It is as simple as that. Schedule picking up your refills a few days in advance of when you need them.

(2) Most doctors stayed awake during their classes in medical school. That means that they probably gave you the recommended dose based on those years of education and experience that led to diagnosis and treatment. You probably assumed they knew something about what you needed, which is why you went to the doctor in the first place. Follow the doctor's advice, please. If you are a vocational rehabilitation client and really cannot afford your

medications, speak with your outreach worker. He or she has a lot of knowledge about resources in your area.

(3) It does seem unnecessary to take medication when you feel perfectly fine. However, many medications continue working after your symptoms have stopped. Those extra days help to insure that your illness does not return.

In the next issue, we will have more recommendations on how you can take charge of your own health. Until then, stay well.

