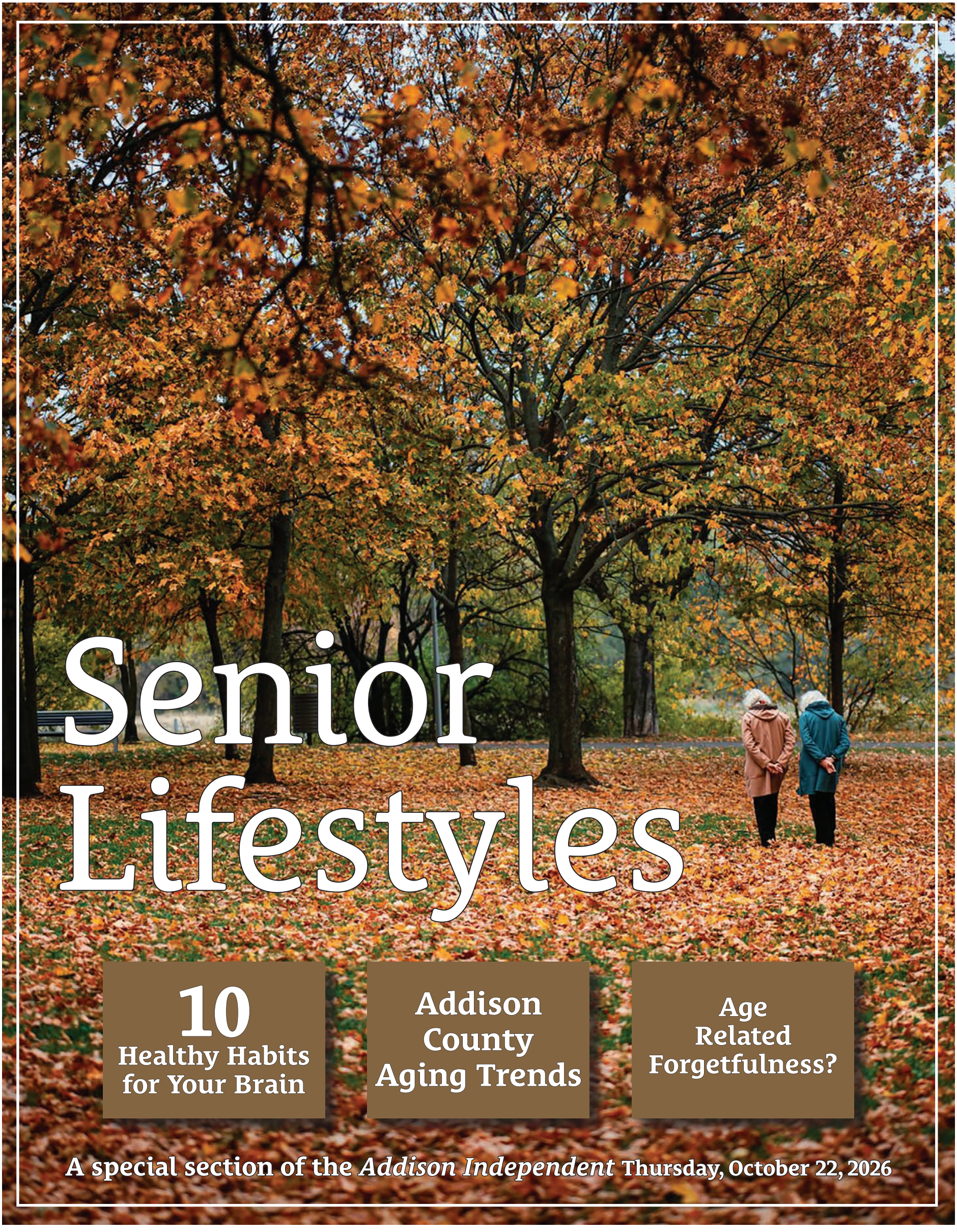


Senior Lifestyles

10
Healthy Habits for Your Brain

Addison County Aging Trends

Age Related Forgetfulness?

A special section of the *Addison Independent* Thursday, October 22, 2026

Three Types of Exercise and Physical Activity



Research has shown that it's important to get all three types of exercise: aerobic, muscle-strengthening, and balance. Adults should do muscle-strengthening activities at least two days a week and at least 150 minutes (2 1/2 hours) a week of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise, according to the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. In addition, older adults benefit from balance exercises and doing a combination of all three types of activity.

Source: National Institute on Aging



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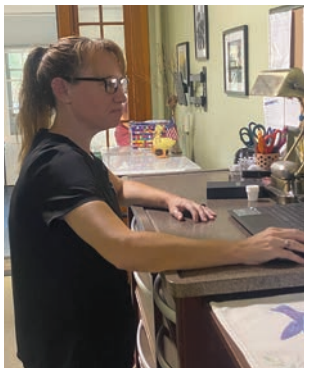
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10 Healthy Habits for Your Brain

Positive, everyday actions can make a difference in brain health, even lowering the risk of cognitive decline and possibly Alzheimer's and dementia. The Alzheimer's Association urges seniors to incorporate some or all of these habits into your life to help maintain a healthy brain.

Take charge of your brain health today — it's never too early or too late to start.

Challenge your mind

Be curious! Put your brain to work and do something that is new for you. Learn a new skill. Try something artistic. Challenging your mind may have short- and long-term benefits for your brain.

Stay in school

Education reduces the risk of cognitive decline and dementia. Encourage youth to stay in school and pursue the highest level of training possible. Continue your own education by taking a class at a local library or college, or online.

Get moving

Engage in regular exercise. This includes activities that raise your heart rate and increase blood flow to the brain and body. Find ways to build more movement into your day — walking, dancing, gardening — whatever works for you!

Protect your head

Help prevent an injury to your head. Wear a helmet for activities like biking, and wear a seatbelt. Protect yourself while playing sports. Do what you can to prevent falls, especially for older adults. This could mean wearing a helmet during activities like riding a bike or scooter, skating and skateboarding, skiing and snowboarding, and some group contact sports like football and hockey. Also, always wear a seatbelt when you are in a vehicle.

And to prevent falls that could hurt your noggin, wear proper footwear and remove trip hazards like cords, clutter and loose rugs to limit the risk of falling at home and at work. Use good lighting throughout your house, especially in hallways, bathrooms and stairways.

Be smoke-free

Quitting smoking can lower the risk of cognitive decline back to levels similar to those who have not smoked. It's never too late to stop.

Control your blood pressure

Medications can help lower high blood pressure. And healthy habits like eating right and physical activity can help, too. Work with a health care provider to control your blood pressure.

Manage diabetes

Type 2 diabetes can be prevented or controlled by eating healthier, increasing physical activity and taking medication, if necessary.

Eat right

Eating healthier foods can help reduce your risk of cognitive decline. This includes more vegetables and leaner meats/proteins, along with foods that are less processed and lower in fat. Choose healthier meals and snacks that you enjoy and are available to you.

Maintain a healthy weight

Talk to your health care provider about the weight that is healthy for you. Other healthy habits on this list — eating right, exercising and sleeping well — can help with maintaining a healthy weight.

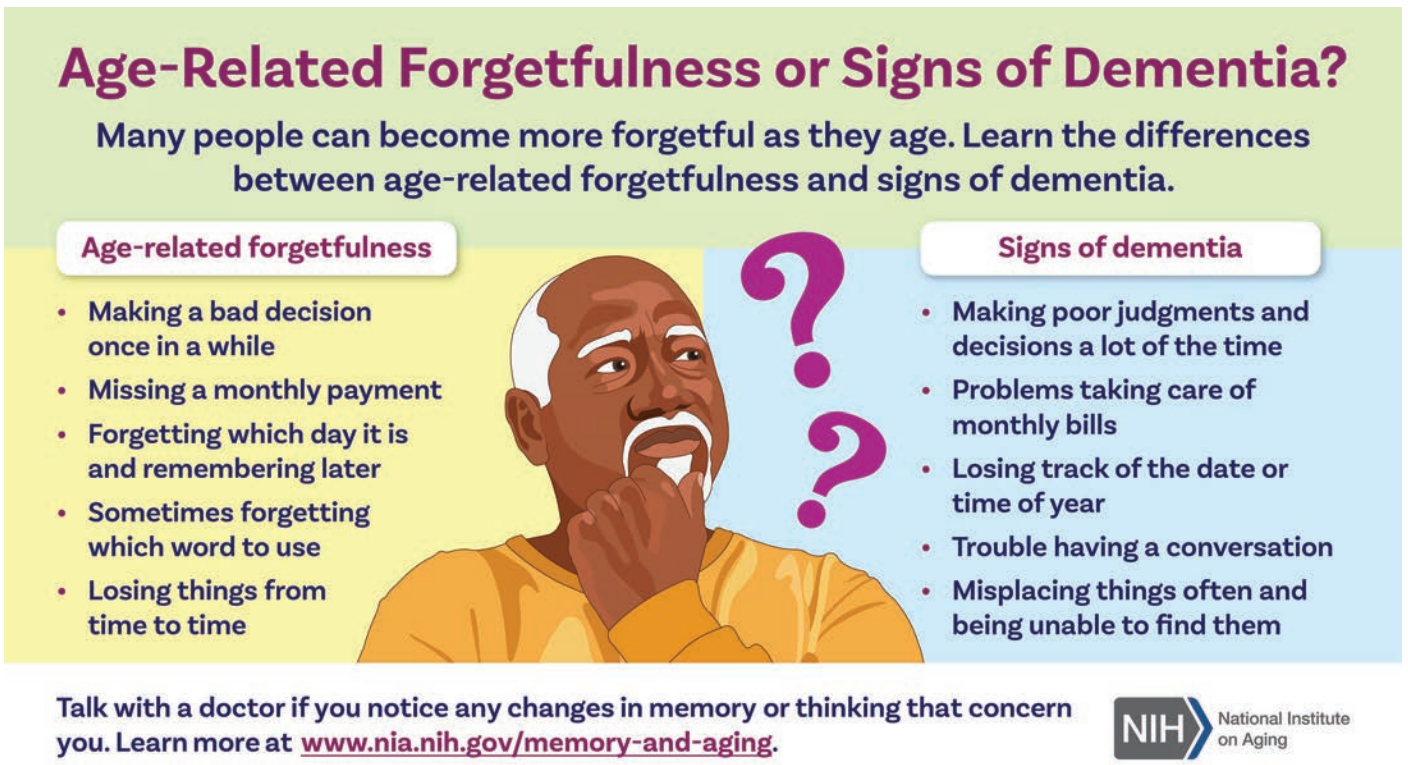
Weight is complex and can sometimes be associated with factors outside a person's control. Midlife obesity increases risk for cognitive decline and possibly dementia. So, maintaining a healthy weight throughout adulthood is important.

Talk with a health care provider about what weight is healthy for you. In addition to making healthy changes, there are new medications that may be appropriate for some individuals to help maintain a healthy weight.

Sleep well

Good quality sleep is important for brain health. Stay off screens before bed and make your sleep space as comfortable as possible. Do all you can to minimize disruptions. If you have any sleep-related problems, such as sleep apnea, talk to a health care provider.

Editor's note: This story was provided by the Alzheimer's Association.



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Keep your mind moving to age gracefully

By JOHN S. McCRIGHT

ADDISON COUNTY — As people age, many fear that they are losing the sharpness in thinking that they once had. Cognitive health is the ability to think, learn and remember things clearly, according to the National Institute on Aging.

The NIA points out that scientific research suggests that there are steps people can take to reduce their risk of cognitive decline and help maintain their cognitive health. One step that many seniors take is they learn something new.

Middlebury College Professor Mike Dash, chair of the Psychology Department, said that the brain's ability to adapt, learn and reorganize itself by forming new neural connections does change as people grow older, but notes that such "brain plasticity" happens throughout every person's life.

> *"If the goal is to preserve cognitive flexibility and engagement, I'd suggest that seniors engage in activities that push them outside of their comfort zones, that release them from the chains of habit."*
>
> *— Mike Dash*

"While I wouldn't argue we should 'worry' about brain plasticity, I think understanding its varied roles in shaping the brain provides a valuable lens to understand ourselves at any age," Dash said.

He points out that, early in life everything is novel and it's hard for the brain to decide what is crucial to remember and what is not, so "the brain extensively remodels itself to try to capture each of its experiences." As we age into early adulthood, the brain starts to be more selective about the information it stores, Dash said, and "even prunes away much of its previous remodeling to remove earlier changes that are not salient or beneficial."

As adults, our brains rely increasingly on habit — drawing on years of experience to prioritize solutions that were previously effective.

"After all, if it worked before, it's likely to again," he said.

This is good for saving brain cycles, but Dash points out that "it becomes harder and harder to escape the well-worn patterns of the brain to reshape one's views, incorporate new information, or adapt to new circumstances."

And thus, many seniors look to get out of that rut by learning something new.

That can take so many forms. Some seniors take cooking, art, dance, language or computer classes. Others form or join a book or film club.

Get in touch with your local community college or library. Many offer free or discounted courses for older adults. You may even be able to find classes online. You might try yoga, tai chi or another new physical activity.

One local activity is seniors (like younger folks) can join Middlebury College's Friends of the Art Museum, known as FoAM. Each year, members help shape the museum's collection, support learning opportunities, and enjoy access to programs that connect people and ideas through the visual arts.

For example, FoAM members this past spring visited the studio of painter Jane Davis. The Rupert artist, who has a show through October at Middlebury's Edgewater Gallery, noted on social media that the visitors had such interesting questions, comments and observations.

In the same vein, Elderly Services Inc. has run a program called "ESI College" in which experts in various fields present a lecture or class on a topic that will get participants thinking. ESI college brings "together adults age 60 and older to learn in an engaging, welcoming environment where questions are encouraged, ideas are exchanged and curiosity thrives," said program manager Kira Winslow. "There are no tests or grades, just outstanding instructors, stimulating conversations and the opportunity to continue learning alongside others who share a love of discovery."

ESI Executive Director Kristin Bolton



MIKE DASH

shares Winslow's enthusiasm.

"Learning opens doors to new perspectives, and ESI College offers a way to step through them right here in our community," she said. "Our most recent series this past fall offered thought-provoking classes that explored the connections between history, culture, science, music and global affairs."

While ESI College this fall included weighty topics like "The Future of Multilateralism" led by Middlebury College Political Science Professor Sarah Stroup, and "Myths and Mysteries

(Continued on Page 5D)



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(Continued from Page 4D)

of Classical Music and Composers" with local musician and scholar Kevin Parizo, the classes span the range of human experience. This past summer, one class for seniors was a Ron Monroe-led discussion on popular entertainment called, "Which is Better — The Novel or the Film? An Exploration."

In deciding what new activity to try, Dash has this advice:

"If the goal is to preserve cognitive flexibility and engagement, I'd suggest that seniors engage in activities that push them outside of their comfort zones, that release them from the chains of habit. Novel experiences, social engagement, and physical exercise are all likely to help stem broad, age-related declines in cognitive ability"

"Such a reliance on habit, while lessening immediate cognitive demands, nevertheless comes with its own consequences; namely, it becomes harder and harder to escape the well-worn patterns of the brain to reshape one's views, incorporate new information, or adapt to new circumstances."

— Mike Dash

Dash, whose research focuses on elucidating the physiological, behavioral and cognitive consequences of spontaneous brain activity, said that long-term changes to the structure of the brain typically require either a) a single event that is particularly salient/memorable or b) repeated practice and engagement.

"As such, a one-time activity or an ongoing activity can each lead to enduring plastic changes within the brain, though the latter is often more likely to actually do so."

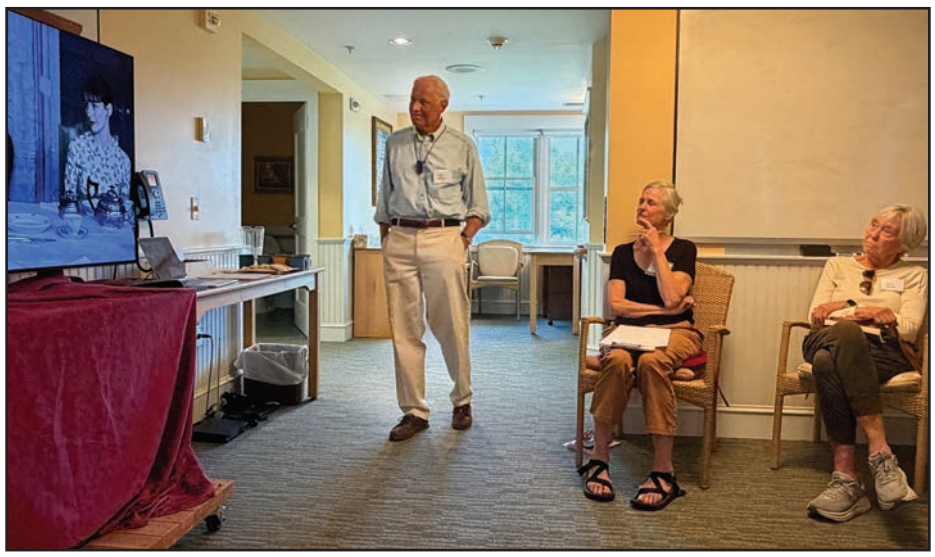
National Institute on Aging reports that studies that tested the effects of cognitive training — specifically memory, reasoning or speed of processing over a decade — showed improvement in cognitive abilities and everyday function of the brain. And the studies found that participants who had training in reasoning and speed of processing experienced less decline than those in the memory and control groups.

When is it too late to start focusing on brain health? Dash would point out that our brains are ever evolving and that even at age 42 he thinks about keeping his mind agile.

"At my age, I'm beginning to worry about the allure of habit and am constantly seeking novel experiences to help me gather new perspectives that ultimately help me overcome the tendency to broadly rely upon habit or, when appropriate, to reinforce those select habits that I think are actually beneficial," he said.

"I don't view brain plasticity as a panacea — in aging or otherwise. Instead it is but one lever we have to enable our experiences to reshape who we are."

— Mike Dash



RON MONROE, WHO spent most of 44 years teaching American and English literature and film, leads a discussion for seniors this summer at Elderly Services as part of ESI College, one venue for older people to keep their minds active.

Photo courtesy of Ron Hallman

Dash sees that things like physical exercise and social engagement can help seniors maintain their skills for decision making, working memory and episodic memory.

Will simply adding brain games to one's daily activities help seniors stave off the worst effects of aging?

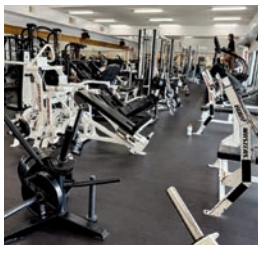
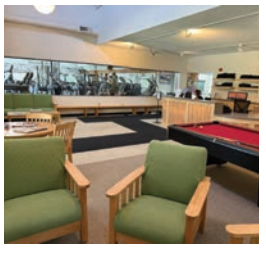
"While there is some evidence that engagement in a specific practice — like a crossword each day — will help maintain or even strengthen that specific skill, there is not a lot of solid evidence to indicate that this practice helps preserve broad brain function and/or memory," Dash said.

So helping your brain — and thus your whole self — age gracefully is a multi-pronged task.

"I don't view brain plasticity as a panacea (in aging or otherwise)," Dash concluded. "Instead it is but one lever we have to enable our experiences to reshape who we are.

"That said, much like a muscle, there is an element of truth to 'use it or lose it' for the brain as well."

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Addison County seniors snapshot

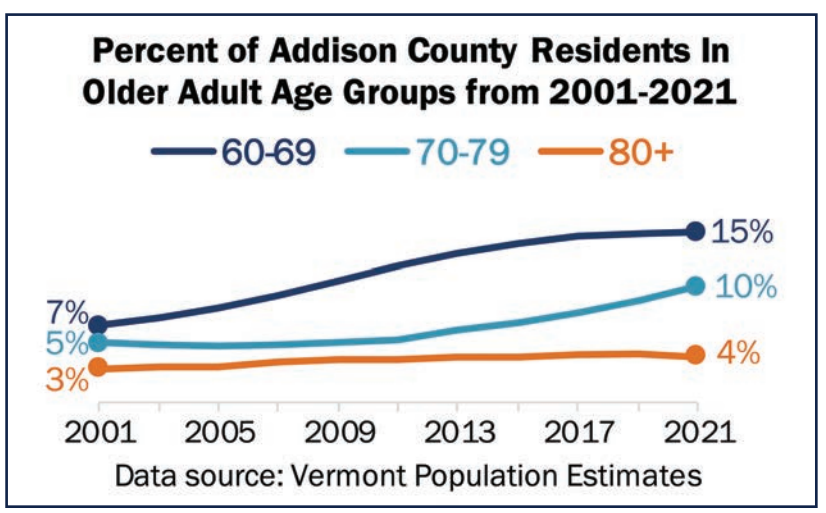
Most people would not be surprised to learn that Vermont's population is growing older.

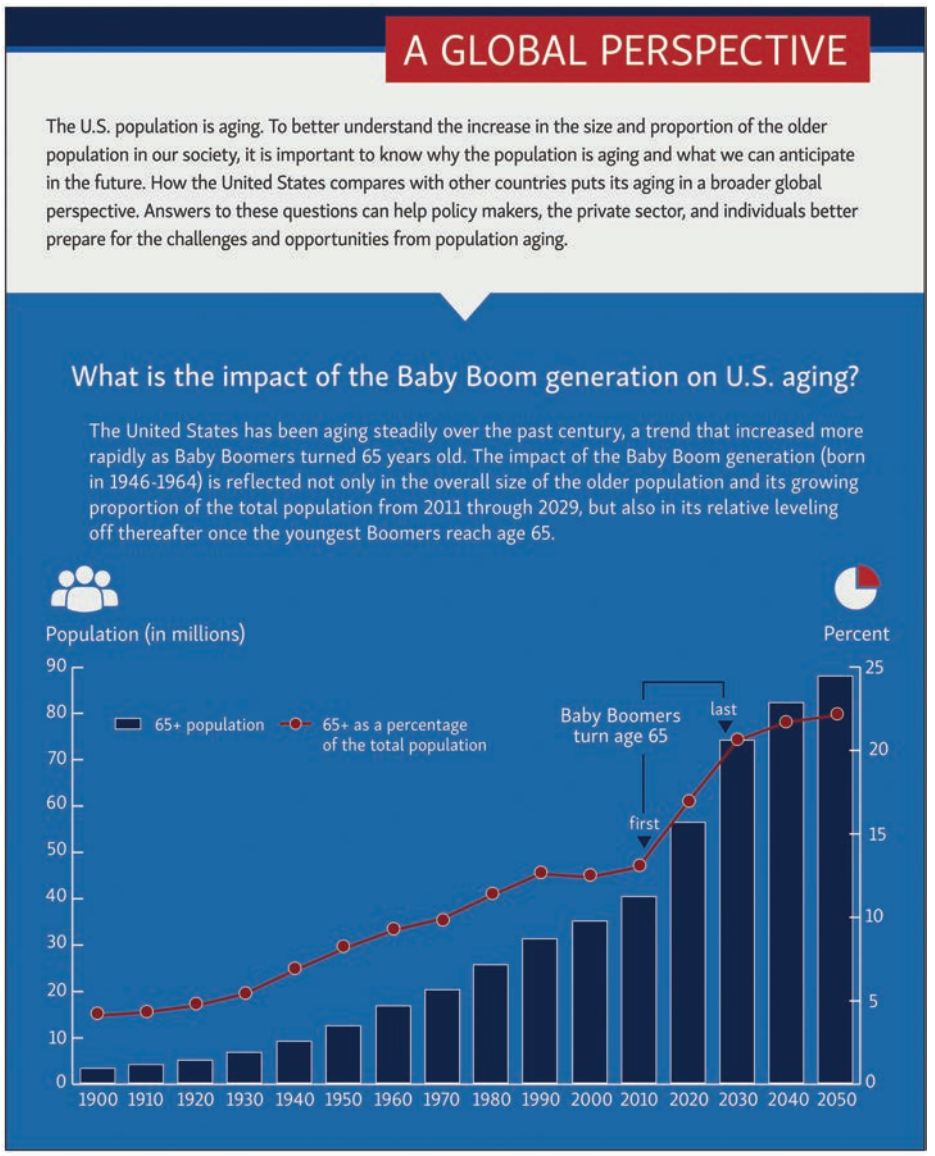
The Vermont Department of Health published data that give a snapshot of the older population in Addison County that many locals will find to be interesting.

One in three Addison County residents are over the age of 60 (30% or 11,100 adults), making it the 10th oldest population in the state, the DOH reports. Since 2001, Addison County has experienced a decreasing youth and an increasing older adult population. An increasing older adult population creates new challenges and emerging health risks.

Age Strong VT, a Department of Health program, is working to make sure all Vermonters can age well. There are health differences between age decades in Addison County, which policymaker are considered when planning institutional support for all older adults. Approximately one-third of adults 70 years and older live alone — and the highest rate of living alone among Addison County seniors if for residents age 80 and older. Older adults who live alone are at higher risk for loneliness, injury from falls, and cognitive decline.

Nine percent of 60–69-year-olds do not receive the social and emotional support they need, according to some studies in the late 2010s and 2020. One-third of all older adults fell in the past year. Experiencing cognitive decline increases with age while not seeing a healthcare provider or drinking alcohol at a risk level decreases with age.





Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base, decennial censuses, and 2014 National Population Projections.

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Seniors are welcome to give blood, and even needed

Is it safe for seniors to give blood?

"While older people more commonly have conditions that make them ineligible to donate blood, if a person is healthy, they can donate at any age," says Dr. Thomas G. DeLoughery, a professor of medicine, pathology and pediatrics in the divisions of hematology/oncology and laboratory medicine at Oregon Health & Science University.

Many blood centers do not set an upper age limit for donors, but some may. America's Blood Centers says age rules can vary by blood center, so older adults should check with their local center.

Beyond a blood center's rules, your health status matters.

"Your ability to donate blood is based on your health history and whether you feel healthy and well on the day of donation," says Dr. Amelia Haj, a blood banking and transfusion medicine specialist.

Are older adults at higher risk for reactions?

When giving blood, older age does not appear to make reactions such as dizziness or fainting more likely.

"There is no evidence to show that older blood donors have higher risk of developing adverse reaction after blood donation," says Dr. Mei San Tang, who is the medical director of the Immunohematology Reference Lab and Blood Services at ARUP Laboratories and an assistant professor at the University of Utah School of Medicine. "In fact, adverse reactions from blood donation tend to happen in younger individuals, females and first-time donors."

Of course, everyone needs to consider their health before donating. A whole blood donation removes about 500 milliliters of blood, says Dr. John D. Roback, a professor in the department of pathology and laboratory medicine at Emory University School of Medicine and director of Emory's Center for Transfusion and Cellular Therapy.

"Most healthy people tolerate this amount of blood loss just fine," Roback says. "But if a donor is frail, has limited cardiac reserve, et cetera, then I would advise them to talk with their own physician prior to donating."

Haj offers similar advice for people who notice that their stamina has changed with age. She says someone who is slowing down or having more difficulty tolerating physical activity may want to talk with a doctor before donating.

What should a senior do before and after donating?

A few basic steps can make the experience easier.

The American Red Cross recommends getting a good night's sleep, eating before your appointment and drinking extra fluids before donating. That means guzzling an extra 16 ounces of water or another nonalcoholic drink before the appointment.



GIVING BLOOD ISN'T difficult for Linda Brown, seen here on Monday at a donation site set up at Woodchuck cidery in Middlebury. She chatted about the local bear siting and read her book while the Red Cross collected her life sustaining gift.

Independent photo/Steve James

Dr. Yembur Ahmad, a member of the faculty at Harvard Medical School, keeps it simple: "Make sure that you stay hydrated and eat something substantial prior to donating."

Afterward, stay at the donation center for the recommended recovery period. Have a drink and a snack before you leave.

Avoid heavy lifting or vigorous exercise for about a day following your donation, advises the Red Cross. "Take it easy the day of and after donation," DeLoughery says. "Some people will have less ability to exercise, but the body recovers quickly."

Make sure to notify a staff member if you start feeling lightheaded, dizzy or nauseous while you are still at the

(Continued on Page 9D)

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ROGER BOURASSA TAKES time out of his busy day on Monday to stick out his arm and donate some blood. A Red Cross worker, who has already checked his blood pressure, finds a vein from which to draw blood from Bourassa, a regular donor.

Independent photo/Steve James

(Continued from Page 8D)

donation center.

If symptoms develop after you get home, some doctors advise seeking medical care for new symptoms and notifying the donation center if you needed medical attention.

"Older adults are needed and welcome to donate," Roback says. "While some of them may be excluded from donating, many qualify and their donations can have an enormous positive impact on the blood supply."

Editor's note: This story was provided by AARP's Donna Freydkin.

American Red Cross

To learn more about blood donations, please visit ***redcross.org/give-blood***

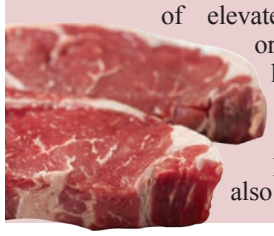
What seniors should know about red meat

As people age, their dietary habits may need to be modified in protection of their long-term health. Seniors may be advised to avoid certain foods, including red meat.

The consensus regarding seniors and red meat now emphasizes balance. Red meat, which consists of beef, lamb and pork, offers bioavailable nutrients that are difficult to get from plants alone. Red meat contains vitamin B12, which is crucial for cognitive function and nerve health. Since absorption of B12 often declines with age, according to UCLA Health, it can be challenging to get enough.

Red meat contains heme iron, which is more easily absorbed by the body than the non-heme iron found in beans or spinach. Iron helps ward off age-related anemia, according to UMass Memorial Health. High-quality protein also is essential to combat age-related muscle loss, a condition known as sarcopenia.

Despite the benefits of red meat, the American Heart Association and the World Cancer Research Fund suggest moderation because of the impact it may have on cardiovascular health. Many cuts of red meat are high in saturated fats, which have the potential to elevate LDL (bad) cholesterol. For seniors with a history of elevated lipid panels or heart disease, leaner cuts of red meat are key. Alternative protein sources also should be chosen more often than red meat.



Limiting read meat also can help combat digestive system concerns. As a person ages, the digestive system produces less stomach acid, says Cary Gastroenterology Associates. That makes it harder to break down heavy proteins like red meat. This can lead to bloating or discomfort if too much is consumed.

Certain studies have explored the link between high red meat consumption and systemic inflammation that can aggravate conditions like arthritis. Baylor College of Medicine says high levels of saturated fat and omega-6 fatty acids could elevate inflammatory markers like C-reactive protein, exacerbating autoimmune conditions and other health issues.

Best practices for seniors concerning red meat involve looking for cuts with "loin" or "round" in the name, as they have the highest protein-to-fat ratios. Seniors also should discuss the newest federal Dietary Guidelines for Americans with their doctors or nutritionists, as the 2026 guidelines represent a significant shift that promotes higher consumption of red meat, full-fat dairy and animal proteins, rather than restricting them to one to two times per week, despite advising limiting saturated fat intake. These contradictory messages may confuse the average person.

As with all dietary recommendations, advice will vary depending on one's specific needs and underlying medical conditions.

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How seniors can build their social networks in retirement

Social isolation and loneliness can have a notably adverse effect on a person's overall health. According to the World Health Organization, roughly 12 percent of older individuals experience loneliness, which can have a negative impact on their physical and mental health, quality of life, and even their life expectancy.

Seniors have much to gain when they take successful steps to avoid social isolation. Seniors who are concerned about the prospect of social isolation or loneliness or those already experiencing such feelings can try these strategies to build their social networks in retirement.

• **Reconnect with old friends.** It's easy for adults to lose touch with old friends. By the time many adults reach middle age, professional and personal obligations can leave little time for a thriving social life. Successful professionals may be preoccupied with work projects, and while parents may be juggling their own hectic schedules with their children's obligations. Come retirement, much of those responsibilities have ended, making this a perfect time to reconnect with old friends who also might have extra free time on their hands. Reach out through social media, text message or even a phone call, and let the situation unfold organically from there.



• **Take advantage of community offerings.** Many communities sponsor events for seniors, like bus trips to local museums or stadiums, in an effort to encourage seniors to get out of the house. Retirees can take advantage of these opportunities, which tend to attract like-minded individuals with the same interests. A bus trip to a theater production will attract fellow arts lovers, and shared interests are a solid foundation for friendship.

• **Start a local club or group.** Starting a local club based on a particular activity is another great way for seniors to build a social network in retirement. Take to social media and express your interest in starting a local book club or walking group. Like community-sponsored bus trips, clubs and groups tend to attract like-minded individuals, providing a built-in pathway to friendship.

• **Reconnect with your faith.** Houses of worship also offer a great way to meet locals and build relationships based on a shared identity. Faith-based communities provide a sense of belonging that can help retirees overcome social isolation and loneliness.

• **Open yourself to new experiences.** Trying something new is another great way to make new friends. Many local agencies like parks departments or community recreation offices offer seniors in-person workshops covering a wide range of activities. These offerings are a great way to discover a new pastime and meet new people along the way.

Social isolation and loneliness poses a significant threat to millions of seniors. But there are many ways for seniors to build their social networks in retirement.

— Metro Creative

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For a one-time $2 fee, Vermont residents age 62 and up, plus honorably discharged veterans, can enjoy free admission to Vermont State Parks and State Historic Sites with the Green Mountain Passport.

It's an easy, affordable way to stay active and enjoy all Vermont has to offer this summer.

Getting your Passport is simple:
- Apply at your town or city clerk's office.
- Pay a one-time $2 fee.
- Receive your card and start exploring.

Find a list of Vermont State Parks online at **www.vtstateparks.com.**

Historic sites are listed at **historicsites.vermont.gov.**



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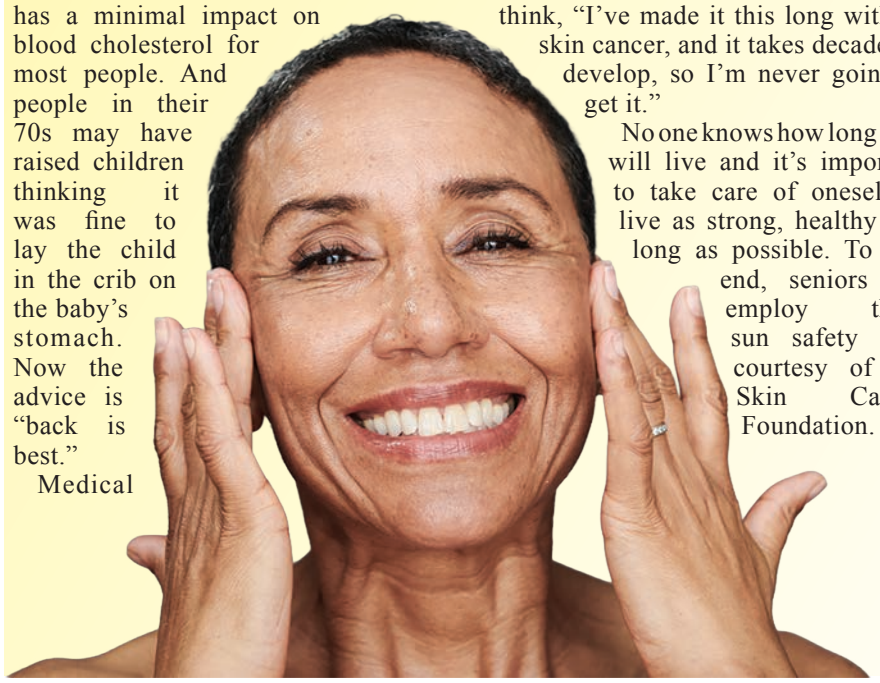
If interested, please send an email to PMC-Volunteers@portermedical.org or call Kelly Walters at 802-382-3444.

University of Vermont Health
Porter Medical Center

Skin cancer prevention advice for seniors

Wisdom and age frequently go hand in hand. But when it comes to knowledge of the latest medical advancements, some older adults may not be up-to-date.

Medical recommendations evolve over time. After all, it wasn't too long ago people were told to avoid foods containing high amounts of dietary cholesterol because it would raise their own blood cholesterol levels. Now MedlinePlus says the general consensus is that eating dietary cholesterol has a minimal impact on blood cholesterol for most people. And people in their 70s may have raised children thinking it was fine to lay the child in the crib on the baby's stomach. Now the advice is "back is best."



Medical professionals now know that exposure to ultraviolet rays of the sun and tanning beds can contribute to the development of skin cancer. But just a few generations ago people were slathering on baby oil and using suntan reflectors to accelerate tanning. The risk of skin cancer is raised for those who have had cumulative exposure to the sun. So it is essential that seniors practice sun safety every day so they are not adding to the damage that already may have occurred. It's also foolish to think, "I've made it this long without skin cancer, and it takes decades to develop, so I'm never going to get it."

No one knows how long they will live and it's important to take care of oneself to live as strong, healthy and long as possible. To that end, seniors can employ these sun safety tips, courtesy of the Skin Cancer Foundation.

• **Learn the facts.** Suffering just five sunburns over your lifetime more than doubles your chances of developing melanoma, and each successive tan or sunburn raises the risk even further. Suntans damage the skin's DNA and age it before its time. Also, skin undergoes changes that reduce defenses against disease and healing. One bad burn as a senior may be the final straw.

• **Use sunscreen.** Sunscreen may not have been widely used when today's seniors were young. Just because that was the norm then doesn't mean things can't change now. It's never too late to reduce your skin cancer risk by lathering on sunscreen daily — even when the sun doesn't seem particularly strong. Seniors should look for a broad-spectrum sunscreen with SPF 30 for daily use.

• **Wear protective clothing.** Choose tightly woven, long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and wide-brimmed hats to protect you. You can purchase clothing that has sun protection built right in.

• **Avoid being outside during certain times of day.** Stay out of the sun when it is at its peak. Radiation is typically the strongest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. That's when the risk for skin damage is highest, says the American Cancer Society.

• **Seek shade.** When spending time outdoors, seek shady spots, whether you're under an umbrella or in tree-lined areas.

Sun safety for seniors is generally the same for people of all ages. But it becomes a more urgent necessity due to cumulative sun exposure that comes with age.

— Metro Creative



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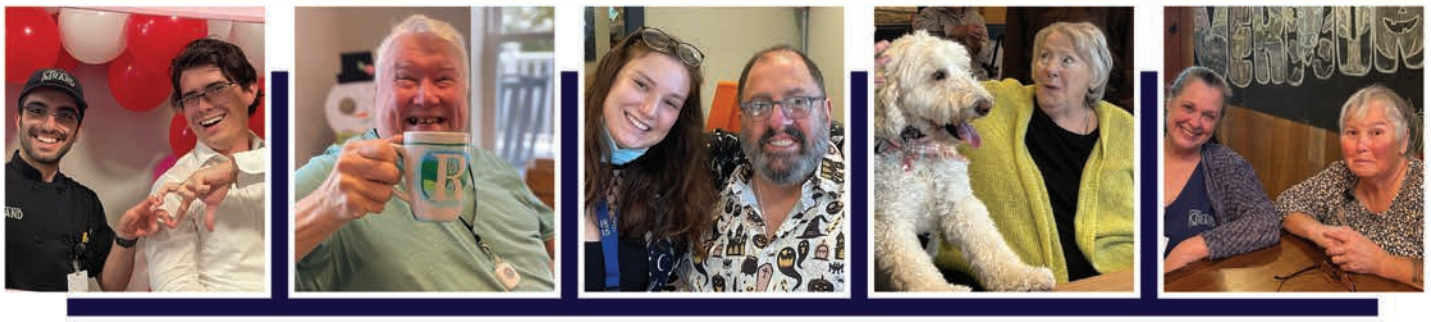
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agewellvt.org | **Helpline: 1-800-642-5119**

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