



Buzz, Body & Bites

A newsletter for actively aging adults

Virginia Cooperative Extension Family & Consumer Sciences

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Social Wellness for a Healthy Lifestyle

As one ages, it is easy to spend more time alone and become isolated from those around us. It is important, however, that we purposefully practice social wellness as we age. If we learned one thing from COVID-19, it was that isolation was hard on mental well-being. Isolating from others creates higher rates of depression and anxiety, so engaging in social activities that we enjoy is even more important now than ever. Social engagements should not be stressful, but a time to do something you love with others who share similar interests. We can also socially engage, while meeting other dimensions of wellness. For example, taking a group exercise class benefits our social needs, while also helping us practice physical wellness. It can be a challenge in retirement to find ways to fulfill our lives socially, especially, if one worked in a service industry. In this situation volunteering may be a good way to be engaged. Volunteering is a way to interact with people, and feel purposeful while giving back to others and the community. There are many benefits to living a socially active lifestyle. Research has shown that rates of depression go down, risk of certain diseases declines, cognitive abilities improve, and people are better prepared to cope in difficult situations. Keeping connections to the community to feel like an active member of society is important. Keeping in touch with friends and family is an easy way to stay socially well. Of course, it is important that the activity is something that you enjoy in order to feel the benefits. A good way to begin incorporating social wellness routines in your life is to write down your interests. Start small, incorporating one activity that interests you weekly. Then build up from there with social activities that best suit your lifestyle. Try to be socially active often to nurture a sense of fulfillment. Carter and Mary Ellen Lyons, two retirees residing in Harrisonburg, VA, are great models of what it looks like to live a healthy aging lifestyle. They reflected on what social wellness means to them, with hopes of inspiring others. Social wellness is important to them because it broadens their perspectives on life, stimulates their life, and feeds the need to go beyond their daily routine. It also helps them develop compassion and empathy for others as opposed to self-absorption. Some ways that they have continued to practice social wellness are staying connected to family by celebrating family traditions, meeting regularly with long-term friends for various social engagements, and taking advantage of local publicized community events.

Contributed by: Abigail Allen, Program Specialist Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community

Social Wellness

Social wellness is a key component of the 8 dimensions of wellness. Social wellness is defined as: "Connecting and engaging with others and our communities in meaningful ways" (Global Wellness

Institute). It is important that you take part in social activities that you enjoy, some examples of social wellness may include:

- Taking an art class
- Joining a reading club
- Having coffee with a friend
- Attending church with family
- Becoming a volunteer in your community
- Taking a group exercise class
- Attending a musical concert

Couscous Chicken

Couscous is a traditional African starch, but is not a grain or seed. It is actually a pasta, made from semolina, a flour made from durum wheat. Easy to cook and delicious, try it for a nice change.

Source: <https://dinnertonight.tamu.edu/recipe/couscous-chicken/>

Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 3 cloves garlic chopped
- 2 (8 ounce) boneless, skinless chicken breasts cut into bite size cubes
- 8 ounces baby spinach
- 1/3 cup reduced-fat Italian salad dressing
- 1 cup canned diced tomatoes undrained
- 2 cups couscous, cooked

Instructions:

1. Wash hands, produce, and equipment thoroughly.
2. Heat olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat.
3. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute.
4. Add the chicken and cook until cooked through and juices run clear. Remove from pan.
5. Add spinach to the pan and cook just until wilted, 1 to 2 minutes. Remove from pan.
6. Add the Italian dressing to the pan, stir scraping to mix in any browned bits. Add the tomatoes, bring to a simmer, and cook for 3 to 5 minutes.
7. Cook couscous according to package directions.
8. Place cooked couscous in a serving bowl. Top with the spinach, chicken, and tomato sauce mixture.

Exercise: Wall Angels

Shoulders and Stability

1. Begin with your back up against a wall.
2. The back of your head, elbows, and back of your hands remain in contact with the wall throughout the exercise.
3. Begin with your shoulder, elbow, and hand at a 90-degree angle.

4. Slowly slide your arms up the wall just a few inches and then slide your arms back to the starting position.
5. Repeat slowly for 10-15 repetitions

Resources

Global Wellness Institute: globalwellnessinstitute.org

What is Couscous? www.foodnetwork.com/how-to/packages/food-network-essentials/what-is-couscous

Dinner Tonight: <https://dinnertonight.tamu.edu/>

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