



# Wellness Plans Boost Participation

*A systematic wellness program introduced by Brookdale Senior Living serves the whole person and improves quality of resident life.*

**A** NEW WELLNESS PROGRAM AT Brookdale Senior Living, Brentwood, Tenn., encourages seniors to reap the benefits of exercise and helps them achieve the physician-recommended 30 minutes of moderate activity almost every day.

“The goal of the program is to improve the health and wellness of older adults through the development of a physical activity plan tailored to their needs and abilities,” says Kevin O’Neil, MD, medical director of Brookdale’s Optimum Life program. “Incorporating moderate activity into every day can impact a person’s health and quality of life.”

The program, dubbed Movement is Medicine, was conceived to complement a Brookdale program that caters to whole person wellness through fulfillment in six key dimensions of wellness: physical, emotional, purposeful, social, spiritual, and intellectual.

“Movement is Medicine demonstrates commitment to physical well-being while complementing Brookdale’s wellness culture,” says Sara Terry, program vice president.

## Exercise Brings Multiple Benefits

“The dimensions of wellness are dynamic in the sense that what is done in one dimension influences the others,” Terry says. “Therefore, an exercise program will have a positive impact not only in the physical dimension, but in other dimensions.”

Not only is exercise good for the body, but it can help emotional and intellectual aspects as well. Regular exercise can be a wonderful anti-



Residents participate in an exercise program at Grant Court Springfield in Ohio.

depressant, and may even help avoid mood-enhancing medication.

In addition to keeping brains fit through intellectually stimulating activities, regular exercise can help preserve cognitive function.

One of the key elements of Movement is Medicine is its adaptability. The program has built-in flexibility for varying ability levels and can be modified accordingly.

In addition, the program can work with onsite therapists to assist residents in making personalized fitness programs that can help residents address any obstacles they may face.

For example, fear of falling can cause older adults to avoid exercise and physical activities; however, this actually increases the risk for falls as muscles become weaker. Confronting the fear and working on exercises that strengthen the legs and improve bal-

ance can help reduce that risk.

All of the program’s activities meet or exceed the guidelines created by the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) and the American Medical Association (AMA) for exercise for older adults.

The instructor-led program is available a minimum of five days per week for residents in all Brookdale communities—independent living, assisted living, Alzheimer’s/dementia care, and skilled nursing.

Since the program is not a ‘one size fits all’ program, ACSM and AMA recommendations can be achieved in a variety of care settings with individual-

KEVIN O’NEIL, MD, FACP, is a specialist in internal medicine and geriatrics and is medical director of Brookdale’s Optimum Life program, which encourages seniors to reap the benefits of exercise.

ized plans based on functional level and abilities.

## Improved Participation

In a survey of 362 Brookdale communities, on average approximately 11 to 20 residents per community participate in a wellness class on any given day.

Most impressively, 86 percent of responding communities have seen up to 10 residents in their community start exercising as a result of this program.

Nearly 12 percent have seen 11 to 20 residents start exercising due to the program.

For example, Sterling House Littleton, an assisted living community in Colorado with 35 residents, has an avid following of residents for its Movement is Medicine program.

“Attendance is growing steadily

as people come in on their way from somewhere else, stay for the remainder of the class, and come back another time. Also, word is spreading in the dining room, and residents are inviting each other,” says Bonnie Conn, life enrichment coordinator for Sterling House Littleton.

“Each regular attendee has expressed how much stronger they are and have made significant improvements in balance.”

Noting the flexibility of the program, Sterling House has made additions to the exercise program, including:

- A name game at the start of each session. Each resident names all others, which is excellent for helping to keep the memory sharp, and builds relationships with other residents.

- When marching in place, all

participants have to name a destination for the march and details. For example, “Where would everyone go in the snow storm today?”

- When bending and reaching, the instructor asks the participants to gather up an imaginary object and struggle to get in on one’s lap during the last repetition. Afterward, the participants each name their imaginary object.

- Stopping frequently and naming where the exercise is felt, such as at the calf or hip, for example.

- Implementing modified meditation during the cool down. Participants close their eyes and imagine something specific during the deep breathing exercise, summoning all five senses to enhance the memory.

## Incentive Plans Work

Socializing and teaming up with peers make an exercise regime more successful. The exercise programs foster a sense of community and unity. Furthermore, research indicates that social interaction and engagement have been shown to lower mortality to the same extent as fitness activities.

In addition to word of mouth among residents, the program encourages participation and motivation through a punch card incentive plan.

Many communities have modified the incentive plan to personalize it to their residents.

The vast majority of participants—nearly 64 percent in the survey—have had a positive response to an incentive plan, which entails the use of punch cards to promote the wellness program’s theme. Staff punch residents’ cards when they participate in a physical activity. When the card is fully punched, the resident gets a prize or is entered into a raffle.

## Residents Choose Activities

Communities are encouraged to choose activities and exercises they would like to see included in the incentive program. Nontraditional activities, such as playing Nintendo Wii, gardening,

## Brain Training Builds Mental Acuity

In conjunction with Brookdale’s Movement is Medicine wellness program, the company recently launched Cross Train Your Brain, an awareness campaign that details the benefits of brain fitness and the many ways to accomplish improved cognitive ability, including physical activity.

The goal of the program is to improve the health and wellness of older adults through brain fitness. Brain fitness does not depend on just what individuals think, but what they do. Research has confirmed the benefits of regular physical activity as well as the importance of emotional health and social engagement.

For example, activities that give a sense of purpose and meaning not only help the brain, but may actually help people live longer and with a better quality of life.

The program also focuses on a holistic lifestyle that emphasizes brain health. Cross Train Your Brain opportunities will be integrated into Brookdale’s year-long life enrichment

and dining experience. Designed exclusively for residents and communities, the dining program offers themed experiences, special events, and enriching programs.

Select Brookdale communities offer a brain fitness computer program—a product aimed at helping seniors maintain mental acuity through brain-building activities.

The system’s interactive puzzles, stories, word scrambles, and other activities are played on touch-screen computers that require no mouse, keyboard, or computer knowledge to operate.

“The system makes it simple and easy for our residents to unleash the power of cognitive exercise to enhance their quality of life and well-being,” says Sara Terry, senior vice president for Optimum Life at Brookdale.

The program’s goal is to educate residents that brain fitness can be improved, and, when done, will positively impact the aging process.

dancing, and independent exercise routines that residents do in their apartments, are encouraged to be included as well. The community then decides which incentives to offer.

Communities have chosen to do anything from giving all participants a smaller prize just for turning in their punch card, to putting names into a raffle to win a larger prize.

“The residents wait for me each and every day and remind me to punch their cards,” said Susan Stoeger, life enrichment coordinator of Chancellor

## Word is now spreading in the dining room, and residents are inviting each other.

Place Murrieta, an independent and assisted living community in Murrieta, Calif.

Most importantly, the program is achieving its goal of improving resident health and wellness. In the survey, almost 84 percent of respondents have observed positive results in residents’ functions or overall wellness as a result of the program.

### Participation Progresses

“The best change so far has been that a few of the residents who have never participated in any type of activity have begun participating in the Movement is Medicine activities,” says Vivian Headden, life enrichment coordinator of Wellington Place of Kennesaw, an assisted living and Alzheimer’s/dementia care community in Kennesaw, Ga.

Other examples of improved health and activity abound. Some highlights culled from the survey comments include:

■ “A resident who was having difficulty with stiff joints has improved her mobility and went from an assist

transfer to self-ambulation.”

■ “Residents are resting better at night and are more energized during the day.”

■ “We have seen more interaction with other residents and a decrease in the number of falls.”

■ “A resident excitedly exclaimed,

‘Now I don’t need to push with my arms when trying to stand from a seated position because of the wonderful exercises we do here.’”

As the Movement is Medicine program grows, more positive results within all the dimensions of wellness will be earned by residents. ■

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