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Wyoming Retired Education Personnel
WREP NEWSLETTER
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Living our Best Life in Retirement

by Jeff Hammer

My wife and I were hiking last year in southern Chile's Torres del Paine National Park. About halfway into our four-day hike, while at the Ataliano Ranger Station, we overheard a young man from France remark to his English-speaking friend this assessment of Americans, "The only thing I know about Americans is that they are fat."

I wanted to rebut his conclusion, that we were on the same challenging trek as him, and we were much more than twice his age, but I also knew that his words contained some truth.

Thirty-five percent of Americans face an obesity issue. As we grow older, the detrimental effects of being overweight compound into health issues that may cut short our retirement years, that special portion of our lives when we really should be focusing on living our most content life.

Even if one does not carry too many pounds, there are things that we should be doing to strengthen our bodies to enhance our retirement years. The National Institute for Health offers these suggestions for older Americans:

- There is no substitute for physical activity, and the most useful and convenient form of exercise is to walk. Walking has been proven to increase bone density. If you are not a walker already, there is no time like today to lace up some appropriate footgear, step outside your entry door and put one foot in front of the other. Even if your route leads you just to the end of your block and back, chances are you will feel better, both mentally and physically, when you return home. Try to make walking a habit and challenge yourself to increase your distance each day.
- When at the grocery store, spend most of your time along the edges, where you will find fruits and vegetables and dairy products. Select high-fiber foods like whole-grain breads and cereals, beans, unsalted nuts and seeds, fruits and vegetables. Choose vitamin D fortified low fat or no fat milk. Soy or almond milk fortified with Vitamin D and calcium is also a good choice. Keeping our bones strong as we age should be a priority.
- Drink plenty of fluids that do not contain sugar throughout the day. Avoid overindulgence of beverages that contain alcohol.
- Avoid highly processed foods which contain high contents of sugar and salt. Take some time to read nutritional labels. If the list of ingredients reads like a novel and you can't pronounce most of the words, the item should be avoided. Remember, the longer the shelf-life, the shorter your life.

As Wyoming retirees, we can tip the health scale in our favor by adopting a few proven habits that will improve our overall well-being and give us the best chance to fully enjoy our retirement years. There is no better time to start than right now

Consider Volunteering

By Mickey Douglas (WREP Past President)

I hope this letter finds you in good health and high spirits. As you reflect on your years in education, I hope you feel a sense of pride for the many years you devoted to students. Even if you are not aware, your legacy will continue to sound in the halls of the school houses.

Retirement offers the opportunity to continue to serve and remain active. Volunteering, or as I prefer to say, a "job without pay", is much needed in all communities. Educators should never completely retire, for they have much to offer.
Folks working in the field of education, including retirees, have formed a bond built by years of dedication. The shared belief that the power of education can change the world, one student at a time, rings true. In someone's classroom are tomorrow's politicians, doctors, parents, and even the president of the United States.

Let's lend our experience to the future of education by being involved. Support today's educators as they navigate a wide range of challenges, by assisting teachers, staff, and students alike. May this season of your life be filled with purpose and satisfaction, knowing your life's work has made a difference.

What's ahead for Wyoming Retired Education Personnel

By Wayne Schatz

All of us have traveled down Wyoming's highways. Some of the stretches of road are mighty long. Have you ever considered how many hours of work have gone into making today's highways what they are—smooth, signed, and efficient for our travels. We know how far it is to the next community, how fast we can drive on this section of road, and if there is a good chance that wild animals could be on the road ahead. Many times we take for granted the conveniences given to us.

The same is true for Wyoming Retired Education Personnel. Someone ahead of us has worked many long hard hours to smooth out the retirement programs for us. WREP leadership has changed and so have our association's Vision, Mission, and Goals. Your executive committee members have spent several meetings making sure the wording says what we are about. A big part of these changes has also been in our Constitution and by-laws. I hope that you will take a moment or two and look over the Constitution, By-laws, Vision, Mission, and Goals. We would like to have your feedback on any of the items. As your executive committee, we used each of these items to help us set some goals for this coming year and beyond.

We need your input and thoughts as we set goals for the year ahead. Our first goal is to fill some important vacancies on the WREP Executive Committee. If you are interested in helping on the Executive Committee, please contact any member of the current executive committee. We would love to hear from you.

There is a story about an old man that was traveling along a road. He came to a break in the road. He began to go around it and decided to stop his trip and fill in the large hole in the road. Another traveler saw what he was doing and asked him why he was wasting his time filling in the break in the road when he was able to get around the break and go on. He replied that filling in the hole was something that he could do and it would save a future traveler from having the broken road become an obstacle to his continuing travels.

We today have the opportunity of filling in possible roadblocks for future retired education folks. We continue to monitor the Wyoming Retirement System board meetings. We also follow the events of our legislators as they work on bills affecting retirees in Wyoming. You need to keep visiting with your legislators and let them know how their work affects you and your family.

What we do today may not seem critical to future retirees in the state, but our state's leaders must be aware of retirees' needs and concerns. This is our way of smoothing out the road ahead, posting warning signs, and setting speed limits for retirees in Wyoming. Because of our work today, the road will not be nearly as long and the trip will be more pleasant for those who must travel it later.

Happy motoring!

Go See a Doctor

by Jeff Hammer

I don't know anyone who likes to go to the doctor. I know I don't, but I understand that to remain as healthy as I possibly can be, seeing my whole cadre of doctors is necessary. In the past year, I have had some unexpected medical issues that by the grace of a higher power and medical professionals, I came through 2025 relatively unscathed considering what could have happened.

In January, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer, which can affect 1 in 8 men nationwide. In 2024, nearly 600 men were diagnosed with prostate cancer in Wyoming, and unfortunately 70 of our residents lost their lives from the disease. Not only is that statistic sad, those deaths were largely avoidable. Starting at age 45, men should have a relatively inexpensive PSA test done to detect the possibility of cancer.

In 2024, my PSA test in early June was only slightly above the normal range. A second test in July was slightly higher, so my Primary Care Provider (PCP) advised me to see a urologist. I took his advice, and I'm glad I did because a biopsy completed in January of 2025 revealed that 5 out of the 12 samples taken were cancerous. The prostate was removed in April, and a PSA test completed in October indicated that the cancer is gone, an outcome for which I am extremely grateful.

If you're a man and you're reading this article, then you're probably at an age where you should be getting a PSA test done at least every two years. Prostate cancer is not the most aggressive cancer one can have, but it's still cancer and it will kill you if left untreated.

By far, the biggest killer in the United States is heart disease. That's something I know a little bit about as well. In March of 2015, I underwent double bypass surgery, and then a month later, in an artery that could not be bypassed, three stents were inserted to unplug the blockage there. And for ten years they worked great. In 2025, a stress test indicated an abnormality in my heart. Further tests confirmed that the artery with the stents had become blocked and that my heart had grown collateral arteries to help with blood flow to that part of my heart, although at a reduced rate. My cardiologist recommended that any procedure that could be done would not produce worthwhile benefits considering the risks involved.

I can still do anything I could do ten years ago, but now when I'm hiking or working out and my heart is racing, I need to stop and let it settle down a little before continuing.

It's a puzzle to me why insurance companies will pay for most of a scheduled colonoscopy every ten years, but will only pay for a heart stress test whenever a patient has already experienced a heart event. Statistically, heart disease is the biggest killer in America. We could reduce that number by scheduling a stress echo test every five years to detect coronary heart disease starting at age 45, earlier and more often if a patient's family has a history of heart disease.

With all the uncertainty surrounding our health care system in this country, there are a few choices we can make as retired people that help turn the odds in our favor. First of all, see your PCP each year and have a full battery of tests completed that might indicate abnormalities; and if abnormalities reveal themselves, address them with an unrelenting aggressiveness until they no longer exist. If your family has a history of any type of illness, start early to have the necessary tests completed to detect that illness.

Information is power, and with health care, it's the power to live a long and healthy life.

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