

## HEALTHY LIVING

## Boomers beware

Survey finds many middle-agers think they're healthier than they really are because they feel good

BY VIKKI CONWELL

Cox News Service

The gap between perception and reality may be widening for baby boomers.

A recent survey conducted by Energizer Battery suggests that people believe they are healthier than they are and make assumptions about their health based on how they feel. More than 73 percent of middle-aged married couples rated their health as good or excellent, yet half of Americans aged 55 to 64 — the oldest of boomers — have high blood pressure, and two in five are obese, according to the National Center for Health Statistics.

"It's just human nature," said Jennifer Zreloff, an internal medicine physician at Emory University whose patients are primarily women between the ages of 30 and 60. People want to see themselves as

young and healthy, but they seldom define high blood pressure and being overweight as being unhealthy, she said.

Compared to previous generations, boomers smoke less and get more exercise, but they maintain high rates of diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity and other chronic conditions. Obesity and poor diet also increase the risk of developing coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes and stroke, the leading causes of death in the United States.

As boomers age, incidents of such conditions increase. Currently, 80 percent of Americans 65 and older have at least one chronic condition, and half have at least two. By 2030, six of every 10 boomers will manage more than one chronic condition, according to health and aging industry predictions.

"If they actually want to live up to being healthy, then they've got to take those

problems seriously," Zreloff said. "We've got to redefine what healthy is."

Dr. Jonathan Flacker, who turns 44 next week, describes his health as "pretty good."

He eats a healthy diet, avoids processed foods and exercises almost daily. His weight, cholesterol and blood pressure rank in the acceptable range. Still, the physician admits that he and other boomers can lead healthier lifestyles.

Boomers are armed with more information about health and fitness than earlier generations, but the incidence of chronic disease confirm that they are not applying what they know, he said.

"Knowledge isn't always power," said the medical director of the Emory Clinic at Wesley Woods whose patients are 65 and older. "We have the ability to ignore what we know and sit on the couch and eat whatever we want."

His recommendations: Don't wait for medical interventions to help you live longer with chronic disease. Instead, maintain a healthy body weight, exercise regularly, eat a balanced diet and schedule regular health screenings.

When people do those things, then they will be healthier, Flacker said. ■



JOEY IVANSO / COX NEWS SERVICE

Millie Witmer works out regularly in Atlanta with a group of about 20 baby boomers.

## FEELINGS ABOUT HEALTH

Additional findings of Energizer Battery's online survey of 44-to-62 year olds include:

- **Diet.** Sixty percent of respondents said they try to maintain a healthy diet, and 46 percent said so do their spouses.
- **Exercise.** Only 33 percent said they exercised regularly to maintain a healthy lifestyle, and 66 percent said they disliked exercise or found it a hassle.
- **Age.** Forty-five percent claim they feel better than their chronological age, while 20 percent said they feel worse.
- **Change.** More than 48 percent of

respondents wanted their spouses to exercise more, 41 percent wanted them to lose weight, and 41 percent wanted them to eat healthier.

- **Supplements.** More than 68 percent report taking vitamins or nutritional supplements to maintain a healthy lifestyle.
- **Expectations.** Nearly half of respondents (48 percent) thought their spouse was aging "as expected." Thirty-nine percent of men said their wives were aging "better than expected," while 30 percent of women thought their husbands were aging better than they expected. ■

## Snacks can be a good thing

BY CAROLYN O'NEIL

Cox News Service

Hot foods should be held at 140 degrees or warmer (you can use chafing dishes or slow cookers or warming trays). Cold foods should be held at 40 degrees or colder (you can nest dishes in bowls of ice or use small serving bowls and replace them).

## When snacks are good

Snacks should be considered mini-meals with a mix of nutrients that includes whole-grain or high-fiber foods and some lean protein. Here are some healthy grab-and-go snack ideas:

- Small oatmeal raisin cookie with a small carton of fat-free or 1 percent milk.
- A few pieces of dried fruit such as prunes, apricots or raisins with a small carton of low-fat yogurt.
- A couple of packaged cheese sticks (Colby, cheddar, reduced fat if available) with whole-grain crackers.
- Fresh apple slices or celery sticks with peanut butter.
- Make-your-own lettuce wraps — a slice of turkey or leftover chicken wrapped in a romaine lettuce leaf.
- Hard-boiled egg with a couple of carrot sticks.

Snacks can be a great opportunity to sneak in the needed number of servings of fruits and vegetables per day. A bunch of grapes and a handful of nuts make a great snack while driving on a long car trip or during an unexpectedly long commute

home. The fruit is not only a source of vitamins, minerals and fiber, but it also contains fluids to help keep you hydrated.

## When they aren't good

Some folks chomp on snacks because they're bored, not hungry, and that, of course, is not a good thing, especially if you're trying to limit calories for weight management. Salty snacks can put daily sodium intake over the limit. Fried snacks can put you over your daily fat and calorie limit. Sweet snacks can spike blood-sugar levels that come crashing down too fast, causing an energy crash, too. Any snack that puts you above and beyond your calorie level for the day is overkill nutritionally and you'll see the results on the bathroom scale as the numbers go in the wrong direction! Just because that fried chicken-finger choice at a fast-food place is called a "snack pack" doesn't mean it's the right snack for you.

## Best diet snacks

Snacks are not only a welcome part of a weight-management plan, they can be allies in the battle. You should plan on no more than 200 calories per snack. The fiber, fluid and lean protein in small portions of foods chosen as snacks can keep your blood sugar on an even keel to help you curb hunger pangs and keep energy levels up so that you get the physical activity that you need.

Healthy snacks include combinations of fruit (fresh, frozen, canned in juice), vegetables (fresh, cooked, in juice form) whole grains (breads, crackers, tortillas or cere-



Read labels closely on foods advertised as healthy. You should plan on no more than 200 calories per snack.

als), low-fat or nonfat dairy products (glass of milk, carton of yogurt, serving of cottage cheese, slices of cheese, frozen nonfat milk desserts), nuts (a handful, not a canful), legumes (black-bean dip, hummus spread) and lean protein (hard-boiled egg, roast beef, turkey, smoked salmon).

Look for products that are portion-controlled for you, such as small packets of nuts, applesauce and yogurts. Look for whole-grain products with at least 3 grams of fiber per serving.

Look for frozen-dessert products with less than 100 calories per serving.

## Kid-friendly snacks

Children need snacks. Depending on the age, they just seem to do better with smaller meals spread throughout the day. So, again, think of snacks as mini meals and great opportunities to deliver needed nutrients. Junk foods are often defined as foods that don't deliver any nutrients, just fat, sugar and calories. Since tiny tummies have room for only so much food, why fill them up

with junk food's empty calories?

Now, there's nothing wrong with cookies, crackers, chips and even the occasional candy. But choose versions that sneak in needed nutrients such as oatmeal raisin cookies (fiber) and whole grain pita chips or other crackers (fiber, and whole-grain nutrients). Dipping fruit into chocolate sauce (strawberries, chunks of pineapple or banana) is preferred over chocolate bars. Also, some fast-food places offer cut-up fruit to go. Need snacks in the car?

Easy-to-peel-and-eat clementine oranges are in season right now and they are the perfect size for kids. How about slightly sweet-tasting grape tomatoes (just like fresh grapes, cut these in half for kids under age 3 to prevent choking) or those fresh carrot chips?

Offer them with lowfat ranch dressing or hummus as a super after-school snack that serves up many nutrients.

## Beverages as snacks

Yes, beverages count! In fact, staying hydrated is vital to support good health for your body and mind. Even if you're mildly dehydrated, you can feel lethargic, irritable and it can diminish mental focus. The best liquid snacks deliver plenty of water whether they're in the form of plain water, flavored waters, nonfat milk, unsweetened iced tea or 100 percent fruit or vegetable juices. But when liquids contain calories, remember the liquid portion of portion control. A glass of fruit juice should be 6 ounces (which counts as a fruit serving) not an 18-ounce tumbler. ■