CITY OF PITTSFIELD, MA
You've Got...
Senior Spirit

COUNCIL ON AGING, Inc.
PITTSFIELD SENIOR CENTER
330 NORTH STREET
PITTSFIELD, MA 01201
413-499-9346 Fax # 413-442-8531

MAY 2018

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The Willing Seniorcraft of Froio Folks Enables an Oasis of Activity

AARP tax preparation
Are You OK? wake-up program
Berkshire Writers Room
Bingo
Brown Bag
Card Games, Bridge, Pitch
Ceramics
Chair Caning
Coffee Shop
Comedy Dungeon!
Community Outreach
Computer Workshop
Exercise Classes-Osteo
Foot Clinic
From Stage to Screen
Gift Shop
“Hand and Foot” card game
Health Education Workshops
Income Tax Preparation
Information/Referrals
Knitting and Crochet
“Legal Education”
Line Dancing
Lunch Served Daily
Mah Jongg
Meditation
Molari Blood Pressure Visits
Pinochle
Poetry
Pool Tables
Quality Time Club
Quilting
Seasonal Celebrations
Scrapbooking & Card Making
Scrabble
Shake Your Soul dance-exercise
SHINE Medicare Counseling
Supportive Day Program
Tai Chi, Tai Chi w/ weights
Transportation
Traveling Friends
TRIAD
Volunteer Opportunities
Woodcarving, Woodworking
Supporting elder independence, SDP provides respite care for individuals 55 and over who face a variety of challenges. Creative staff engagement ensures essential participation and socialization activities. Weekdays, 9 to 3, transportation may be arranged. Please call Janie Bates, 499-9346, for full information.

Nearly 7 of 10 Americans age 55 and older are carrying some form of debt, and half don’t ever expect to be debt-free or don’t know if they ever will, according to a new poll.

The survey of more than 1,100 U.S. adults conducted by YouGov for CreditCards.com found that for older Americans, the most common type of indebtedness is credit-card debt, held by 62 percent. Nearly half of those surveyed—47 percent—owe money on home mortgages, while 35 percent have auto loans, 19 percent have medical debt and 12 percent are paying off home equity lines of credit.

Another 11 percent of older Americans have personal loans to pay down, while 9 percent are still dealing with educational debt from their student days.

The extent of indebtedness amid a growing economy is worrisome, said Matt Schulz, an analyst for CreditCards.com. “That makes it really challenging for them to put away enough money for the future when times may not be so good,” he said. “Debt keeps people from saving for retirement or adding to their emergency fund. Generally, it makes their future a little less secure.”

Schulz also is concerned that many are carrying debt as they get close to retirement, when they may have a fixed income or less money to cover payments.

Older Americans in the survey seemed concerned, too. Only about a third said they felt positive about their amount of debt or at least regarded it as manageable. More than half said they’re more comfortable in 2018 with paying down existing loans, while only 7 percent said they were okay with taking on more debt.

Schulz said that even older people who’ve amassed substantial debt shouldn’t just throw up their hands. “With discipline and planning, there’s always hope to pay down debt,” he said.

By Patrick Kiger, AARP, January 19, 2018
A convenient source for local services

FIND AN ADVERTISER NEAR YOU
SEARCH SUPPORTERS OF OUR CENTER to find trusted services in our area!

our senior center

PLUS Sign up to have our newsletter emailed to you!
Your Body's General Health at 50+

What to expect, look forward to, and do now for a longer, happier life

The following are but a few of the health aspects (General, Brain, 5 Senses, Muscle and Brain) covered by Sari Harrar in AARP The Magazine’s April-May 2018 edition, that encourage wellness in your 50s, 60s and 70s.

Taking positive actions in your 50s can help to ensure good health as you age. The good news about being in your 50s: You’re the boss. You’re at the age of accomplishment, just when the kids have moved out, and if you still feel 40, it’s because you pretty much are.

Reality check about being in your 50s: Exercise, nutrition and regular checkups are critical. The choices you make now will determine how you age in the decades to come.

You’ve got a lot of life to live. As you turn 50, you typically have another 36 years of life if you’re a woman, and 32 more years if you’re a man, according to the most recent life expectancy data from the U.S. government. Make it into your next decade and the news gets even better. Women who are 65 are now projected to live to nearly 87 years of age; men who reach 65 should live until 84. That’s why taking care of yourself today is so critical.

You may finally get relief from allergies. The bane of springtime, allergies are the symptoms of an overactive immune system. Many people in their 50s discover that lifelong allergies begin to fade as their immune systems subside. The trade-off: New allergies are possible, and you may be more susceptible to colds and flu. Also, before your next vaccination, watch a Bill Murray movie. A recent study showed that being in a good mood when you receive a shot improves your overall immune response, making the vaccine more effective.

You’re more fit than you may think. Even if you’re not as lean as you once were, you may be just as fit. A Canadian study found that among middle-aged people with mild to moderate obesity, 41 percent could still be considered fit, based on their blood pressure, cholesterol levels and blood glucose levels. The determining factor isn’t weight but something else we can control: exercise, a minimum of 150 minutes a week.

You can make your heart 25 percent stronger, even if you haven’t exercised in years. Everyone, including master-level athletes, loses aerobic capacity by midlife; your ticker pumps less forcefully, and cells throughout your body absorb a bit less oxygen with each heartbeat. “Imagine a brand-new box of rubber bands,” says University of Texas researcher Benjamin Levine. “Stretch them and they snap back. Stick them in a drawer for 10 years and what happens? They’re stiff; they’ve lost elasticity.” That’s what happens to the heart’s left ventricle, which pumps oxygenated blood back into the body. Levine’s studies showed that those in their 50s can increase the heart muscle’s elasticity by 25 percent with four 30-minute workouts and one hour-long one per week.

Your colon cancer risk is the lowest in history ....

if you get screened. Only 58 percent of people in their 50s pursued recommended colon cancer screenings in 2015. Getting screened is a top reason that rates of colon cancer are dropping in the U.S., according to the American Cancer Society. If you can't deal with a colonoscopy, your doctor can prescribe a simple send-in-a-stool-sample test, an effective alternative.

It's time to be the boss of your blood sugar. Your pancreas's insulin production drops about 5 percent per decade. At the same time, your body may become more insulin resistant. The result: Your fasting blood sugar level may rise six to 14 points in your 50s. More than half of us will have diabetes or prediabetes by the end of this decade. A key prevention strategy: Eat brightly colored produce. Spinning the color wheel for what's on your plate could lower your odds for type 2 diabetes by 27 percent, a French study found.

Your Brain at 50+

What to expect and how to preserve your cognitive function

Research shows that people in their 50s are as strong as ever in problem-solving abilities. The good news at 50-plus: By many measures, your thinking has never been better. People know it.

The reality check at 50-plus: Lifestyle choices may be hurting your gray matter in silent ways. You’ll want to change that.

Your reasoning skills are going strong. “Crystallized intelligence” refers to your ability to use learned knowledge and experience to solve problems. Research shows that you’re as strong as ever in this key form of thinking. No wonder the average Fortune 500 CEO gets hired at age 50 — and that airline pilot Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger was 57 when he successfully landed that jetliner on the chilly Hudson River in 2009.

Your memory center is still steady. Yes, it’s true that the human brain loses 5 percent of its volume per decade starting in the 40s. But relax: That doesn’t have any impact on your ability to think or function. In particular, your hippocampus — a key memory center in the brain — is holding steady in size, as is your brain’s white matter, the crucial nerve bundles that carry signals from one part of the brain to another.

You don't freak out as easily. The brains of older adults process emotions in a healthier way. Your “Take it easy” prefrontal cortex is now hooked up with your more reactive “OMG!” amygdalae. The result is that you respond less strongly to negative situations and get a bigger charge out of positive stuff.

Continued on insert page
May Foot Clinic
499-9346
Wed May 2nd
$30 By Appt.

Mothers’ Day @ Meal Site
Thurs, May 10th 11:30
Reserve a day ahead, 1-800-981-5201

7th Annual Froio Variety Show!
Thursday, May 10th 1:00 p.m.
Support your local Froio-folks!

New Member Day
Find your way.
Let us know you’re coming. 499-9346
Wed May 16th 10:00

May Breakfast Club
Always Delectable! Always Informative!
Roger Gutwillig, Berkshire Museum docent and Comedy Dungeon poobah, speaks about plans to initiate special group tours for Froio folks!
Thu May 17th Special Date! $3.00 8:00 a.m.

May Card Party
There’s still room!
Four-somes are best. $2.00
Thur May 17th

S.H.I.N.E.
(Serving Health Insurance Needs of Everyone)
By Appointment 499-9346
Tuesdays @ 12:00

Legal Education
Have legal questions evaluated.
Thu May 17th 1:00 p.m. By Appt.

Molari Blood Pressure Clinic
499-9346 By Appt.

Brown Bag Day
Fri May 25th
10:30
... but stress hasn’t gone away. One in 4 people in their 50s say their stress is going up, up, up. Money, work and — oh, yes — the future of our nation were top stress-makers for U.S. adults in 2017. Don’t let the tension morph into depression. One recent study showed that just an hour a week of easy exercise lowered the risk for depression by 12 percent.

Hormone changes can help. Why are wives always saying, “We already talked about this”? There’s a reason why husbands have trouble remembering their wives’ words. It’s hormones. In a study, women ages 45 to 55 outperformed their male counterparts in a series of memory tests, and premenopausal women outperformed postmenopausal women, possibly due to a decline in estrogen after menopause.

High blood pressure might be hurting your brain wiring. Thirty-three percent of people in their 50s have high blood pressure, and half don’t have it under control. The brain connection: High blood pressure can shrink your brain, scramble brain-cell connections and damage blood vessels. All this boosts your future risk for Alzheimer’s disease by 60 percent.

... and so is all that dessert you’re eating. Another reason for you to manage your blood sugar is that too much of it damages arteries that feed your brain. Cells, plus elevated blood sugar encourages the buildup of the plaques and tangles that are the hallmarks of Alzheimer’s disease. The take-home message: “There is growing recognition that we need to address cardiovascular risks in midlife to protect the brain in old age,” says Elizabeth Selvin, a professor of epidemiology at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore. “The lesson is that to have a healthy brain when you’re 70, you need to eat right and exercise when you’re 50.”

Say hello again to your dreams. The architecture of your night’s sleep gets an overhaul by the time you hit your 50s. You have less deep sleep, as well as less memory-consolidating REM sleep and more time spent in the light stages of slumber. Make the most of every night’s sleep by using a night filter or blue-light-filtering glasses with your electronic devices (or simply turn ‘em off a few hours before bed). Cutting exposure to blue light improved sleep quality and length, a recent University of Houston study discovered.

Your brain might want a pet kitty. Sure, you’ve heard all about the mood-boosting benefits of owning a dog. But don’t underestimate the power of having a cat in your home. Of 47 million U.S. households with a cat, 1 in 3 owners are in their 50s or 60s, according to a 2017 national survey. The benefits? In a 2017 study, cat owners who were in their late 50s had half as many diagnosed health conditions and took 30 percent fewer prescribed medications as did their counterparts who didn’t own a cat.

Your 5 Senses at 50+
What to expect with your sensory function

Your taste palate changes as you age, so now may be the time to try foods you once thought too spicy. The good news

for your senses at 50-plus: Your body’s web of sensory nerves still flashes news to your brain at speeds up to 268 miles per hour.

The reality check for your senses at 50-plus: Some of your senses may start needing a boost, be it hot sauce or glasses.

Your eyes are looking good. More than 90 percent of people in their late 50s are untouched by cataracts or other serious eye issues. Especially if you live north of the Mason-Dixon Line. A recent study found that for every one degree higher in latitude you live, your chance of having cataract surgery is decreased by 1 percent. Indeed, odds for this surgery are 20 percent lower in Portland, Ore., than in Miami, probably due to the difference in UV-light exposure — one more reason sunglasses aren’t just for playing cool.

You might get more floaters. Surprise: Those little squiggles moving about aren’t on the surface of your eye — they’re inside. Age-related changes could cause an increase in floaters in your 50s and beyond. It’s usually not a problem unless they come with other symptoms, such as flashes of light. Get regular eye exams so your eye doc can keep track of this and other eye-health indicators. Rates of macular degeneration and glaucoma double between ages 45 and 55.

You don’t notice the blister on your foot. After 50, many people begin to experience a reduced sensitivity to pain or may be better able to tolerate it.

It’s a great time to explore new, interesting foods. If you’ve always avoided, say, Indian food because you couldn’t handle the spice, now may be the time to rethink this. Your tongue’s number of taste-sensing cells will begin to diminish in your late 50s. Salty and sweet tastes are the first to decline, along with overall flavor intensity, which may cause you to use more salt and sugar in your cooking. Plus, brush, floss and see your dentist regularly — gum disease can leave a bad taste in your mouth that changes the taste of food.

... and strong aromas don’t bother you as much. Your nose’s nerve endings intercept odors and send them to the brain for processing. These sensors wear out over time; exposure to strong chemical fumes and insults such as sinus infections also have an effect.

You may want to turn up the lights ... At midlife the eye’s lens stiffens and the muscle fibers that control the lens’s shape weaken. You may need more light for reading because your pupils don’t open as wide.

... or use a hearing aid. One in 5 people in their 50s have trouble hearing sounds below a quiet whisper. Loud sounds knock out tiny hair cells inside your ears that send sound signals to your brain. Today’s hearing aids are nearly invisible; if you’ve tried them and they no longer work for you, talk with your physician about a cochlear implant, which can restore hearing.

Continued on insert page
MAY SENIOR CENTER EVENTS

Everyday! 11:30 a.m. Meal Site
Esteemed French chef Jacques Pepin noticed, "My palate is simpler than it used to be. A young chef adds and adds and adds to the plate. As you get older, you start to take away." Enjoy! Reserve a day ahead, 1-800-981-5201.

Tuesdays! 12:00 p.m. SHINE (by appointment)
SHINE (Serving Health Insurance Needs of Everyone) counselors help you navigate the oft treacherous maze of health insurance programs. Call Froio at 499-9346, or Elder Services directly at 499-0524.

Wednesday, May 2 8:30 a.m. May Foot Clinic (by appt.)
The ancient Roman statesman Agustus advised one and all to, "Hasten slowly." Hopefully you'll proceed with all due urgency and resolute steadfastness to Sandra Doppell's May Foot Clinic.
Be grounded and rounded! Call for appointment, 499-9346.

Monday, May 7 & 21 10:00 a.m.
The Councilman is In!
The Froio Center hosts councilman Kevin Morandi's invaluable "open office" sessions. His informal Q & As take place a day before City Council meetings, maximizing the potential for a responsive "public-to-council" conduit.

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Thursday, May 10 11:30 a.m. Mothers' Day Party at Meal Site!
Join us for our annual nod and tip of the cap to mothers everywhere, past and present. It's always a joyous occasion, as long as you remember to sit up straight and eat your vegetables! Reserve a day ahead, 1-800-981-5201.

Thursday, May 10 1:00 p.m. 7th Annual Froio Variety Show!
Hopefully you'll segue from the Mothers' Day luncheon directly to the 7th Annual Froio Variety Show. In what has become entrenched as a performance institution, you'll be in awe of the talents bursting from you fellow Froio-folk!

Thursday, May 10 4:00 p.m. Pittsfield Tree Watch
At last! Tree Watch is slated to make its annual springtime renewal this month. Explore all the branches of your deep-rooted tree interests. 4:00 p.m. in the Coffee Shop.

Wednesday, May 16 10:00 a.m. Senior Center New Member Day Tour
Unearth the basic facts, and the nuances, of the Senior Center. There's more than meets the eye and we relish the opportunity to convey the full essence de Froio. Let us know you're coming, 499-9346.

Thursday, May 17 8:00 a.m. Breakfast Club (SPECIAL DATE!)
Roger Gutwillig, Berkshire Museum docent and Senior Center comedy captain speaks seriously about plans to initiate special group tours of the museum for Froio folks. Always delectable, always informative! Call or sign up, 499-9346.

Thursday, May 17 1:00 p.m. Card Party
Nineteenth century French poet Charles Baudelaire noted that, "All which is beautiful and noble is the result of reason and calculation." It's easy to extrapolate that breadth of appreciation to a particularly fine card hand at Monthly Card Party. Bottomless coffee, prizes and snacks! Unless otherwise arranged, foursomes are best.

Thursday, May 17 1:00 p.m. Legal Education (by appt.)
Attorneys from Pittsfield Family and Probate Court evaluate your legal issues.
By appointment, 499-9346.

Tuesday, May 22 8:45 a.m. Molari Blood Pressure Clinic (by appt.)
Molari Health Care monitors your blood pressure. Call 49-9346 for an appointment.

Friday, May 25 10:30 a.m. Brown Bag
Be a part of this budget-boosting nutritional grocery program. Inquire about Brown Bag and SNAP benefits.

Monday, May 28 Senior Center CLOSED Memorial Day
General Health at 50+

Continued from insert page

You may stumble more often. Balance issues in your 50s may be caused by hearing loss. “Balance gets thrown off when you can’t hear your footsteps,” says Frank Lin, M.D., associate professor of otolaryngology at Johns Hopkins University. Ask your doctor if it’s time for a hearing test.

Your Muscles and Bones at 50+ What to expect for your strength, balance and even your skull.

Exercise can help preserve your bone density as you age. The good news in your 50s: Your muscular endurance is still robust.

The reality check in your 50s: Your weight will probably peak. Here are a few changes to watch out for:

It’s time to embrace the power of protein. On average, people lose about 30 percent of their muscle power between ages 50 and 70. But this doesn’t have to be; inactivity and too little protein hasten the process. Keep muscles healthy with regular strength training — a smart step that 79 percent of people in their 50s skip. And try eating more protein at breakfast and lunch. Most people over 50 get the majority of their protein at dinner. Bumping up your intake a little and spreading it throughout the day — oatmeal with almond butter at breakfast, a tuna sandwich at lunch — could help preserve muscle mass and strength, research suggests. Muscle matters: By making it a priority, you’ll cut your risk for diabetes, heart disease and frailty, and preserve your independence in the decades to come.

Exercise if you want to lose weight. In a recent Wake Forest University study of 249 older overweight adults, those who cut 300 calories per day lost 12 pounds, two of which were muscle. But those who cut the 300 calories and also did strength training lost nearly 20 pounds in the same time frame, and more of it came from pure fat.

But still cut those calories. The average 50-year-old consumes 285 more calories a day than our grandparents did at this age. If willpower isn’t enough to prompt your weight loss, try acceptance-based therapy. Skipping ice cream and being sure to exercise really aren’t fun, but they’re essential for reaching goals that matter the most to you. This attitude shift helped dieters drop 36 percent more weight, and keep it off longer, in a recent study of 190 overweight men and women, average age 51.

Another incentive to exercise: You’ll preserve bone density. Thanks to declining estrogen at menopause, women’s bones thin fastest between ages 50 and 60, losing as much as 15 percent of the dense outer layers that guard against fractures and more than 30 percent of the honeycomb-like inner layer. About half of all women over 50 will break a bone someday because of this. Men also begin losing bone density, as the body’s never-ending cycle of microscopic bone breakdown and reconstruction shifts gears. Prevention? Get your daily calcium quota (preferably from food; one major new analysis has found that supplements don’t prevent fractures).

Your skull is shifting. The bones of the skull change as we age. Eye sockets get bigger, jaws become more pronounced, and facial bones thin. These changes happen to both sexes but generally affect women slightly earlier than men. Don’t worry; it’s not a problem.

You’re a little shorter. Thanks to the flattening of the 23 spongy disks in the spine (along with age-related muscle loss), the average woman in her 50s is a half-inch shorter than the average woman in her 40s; men’s vertical loss is about one-tenth of an inch by age 50. By age 80, you may lose 2½ to 3 inches of height, enough to require re-hemming your pants. Plus, this will raise your risk for back pain. To stand taller, protect your bones by performing weight-bearing exercises, getting enough rest and eating plenty of dairy, fish and dark, leafy greens.

You’re wider, too. For women, waistlines grow about one inch from age 40 to 50; men may add a half-inch.

You need new shoes. Feet flatten out and get bigger during adulthood, especially in our 50s. As muscles and connective tissues weaken, the 26 bones in your tootsies start to shift. And weight gain adds to the issue; your shoe size may grow as much as a full size between your early 50s and mid-60s.

You’re not as spry a dancer. Muscles take longer to respond to brain signals starting in your 50s, and you begin to lose the muscle fibers that are responsible for making you move swiftly. Health tip: If you’re bedridden with a bad cold or back pain, try to get up and move a little. For every day you spend confined to bed, you can lose around 1 percent of your muscle strength.

Your endurance is solid, and your injury risk is low. Despite some inevitable muscle loss, you can still plan on celebrating your 60th by running a 10K. Yes, it’s safe; in fact, a University of Texas study showed that there was no age-associated increase in injury risk for older athletes.

You run the same distance and eat the same amount of food you always did but still gain fat. What gives? Your body needs fewer calories as you hit your 50s. A moderately active man who ate 2,600 calories a day in his early 40s needs about 200 fewer calories daily; a moderately active woman should reduce calories from 2,000 to about 1,800. Skip the bacon with your morning eggs, or cut one beer from your happy hour.
“CELEBRATING SENIORS”
SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

WHEN: **May 1, 2018 at 10:00 a.m.**
WHERE: The Ralph J. Froio Senior Center, 330 North Street, Pittsfield, MA
WHAT: Groundbreaking ceremony and open house

We kick off the week at the Senior Center by marking the beginning of the restoration project for the building’s historic marquee, followed by an open house where you can see firsthand what an important role this Center plays in the lives of seniors and their families.

WHEN: **May 2, 2018 at noon**
WHERE: The Ralph J. Froio Senior Center, 330 North Street, Pittsfield, MA
WHAT: Senior Luncheon

Did someone say lunch? We sure did! Please join us for a delicious luncheon prepared right here at the Senior Center to celebrate and honor our seniors.

WHEN: **May 3-4 & 7-8, 2018 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.**
WHERE: The Ralph J. Froio Senior Center, 330 North Street, Pittsfield, MA
WHAT: Tours of the Senior Center

Haven’t seen the Senior Center yet? Stop in and we will show you around. To make the most of your tour, call ahead to let us know you are coming at (413) 499-9346. We’d love to see you!

WHEN: **May 8, 2018 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.**
WHERE: The Ralph J. Froio Senior Center, 330 North Street, Pittsfield, MA
WHAT: Senior Ice Cream Social

I scream, you scream... well you know the rest! Let’s get together for an ice cream social. It's a great opportunity to sit and talk with our seniors while enjoying a sweet treat!

WHEN: **May 10, 2018 5:00 – 7:00 p.m.**
WHERE: The Colonial Theatre, 111 South Street, Pittsfield, MA
WHAT: Celebration Reception

The festivities conclude with a celebration reception at the grand Colonial Theatre where you can relax and mingle with fellow supporters while enjoying slide shows of the Senior Center past and present. Tours of the Colonial will also be given by local historian and Senior Center member Bill Munn. Hors d’oeuvres and light fare will be served, along with a cash bar. Ticket Price: $25 per person.

PLEASE RSVP TO ANY OR ALL OF THESE EVENTS
BY CALLING THE SENIOR CENTER AT (413) 499-9346
HOPE TO SEE YOU SOON!
“Drug problems are deeply stigmatized,” Dr. Humphreys said. “People feel it’s insulting to say they might have a problem with a drug.”

Nevertheless, even people who have taken benzos for extended periods without noticing any problem face potential harms at older ages, Dr. Humphreys noted.

“There’s a parallel with alcohol,” he said. “Maybe you had a double Scotch before dinner without problems through your 50s. In your 60s, you get lightheaded” from the same amount, because older bodies metabolize drugs differently. (Alcohol, by the way, is another substance you don’t want to combine with benzodiazepines.)

Persuading users that they should stop is only the first step, however. “Weaning someone off these things when they’ve become habituated is incredibly difficult,” Dr. Schoenbaum said.

Significant declines in benzo use among older people in Ontario, Canada, in Australia and in the Veterans Affairs health care system in the United States show that it can be done, with more cautious prescribing and programs to help users become ex-users.

But it’s not easy.

“You never, ever recommend that someone stop cold turkey,” Dr. Maust said. That can bring withdrawal symptoms that include nausea, chills, anxiety, even delirium. “You taper down very gradually.”

Canadian researchers have demonstrated that some older users can taper off with an informational booklet and a 21-week tapering protocol, an approach the Veterans Affairs has begun using. Most patients should expect to spend six to 12 months detoxing, Dr. Maust said.

But some find it takes much longer, with rebound effects unlike those of other habituating drugs.

When Ms. Falstein began experiencing “jelly legs” that left her too weak to stand for long, increased panic attacks, extreme fatigue and other health problems, she and her psychopharmacologist agreed that she should begin tapering off her benzos.

“I thought I’d be off them in a year, maybe two,” Ms. Falstein said. But it has taken five so far, with the support of a Facebook group and a “taper friend” she speaks to almost daily. Using a method called liquid titration, she has been able to discontinue Ativan and cut back to less than a daily milligram of Klonopin.

Though she suffered a variety of debilitating symptoms, “I was determined,” she said. “I’m going as quickly but as safely as I can.”

She figures she has two years to go.

By Paula Span, “The New Old Age” column, New York Times, March 16, 2018
A Quiet Drug Problem Among the Elderly

Despite warnings from experts, older people are using more anti-anxiety and sleep medications, putting them at risk of serious side effects and even overdoses.

At first, the pills helped her feel so much better.

Jessica Falstein, an artist living in the East Village in Manhattan, learned she had an anxiety disorder in 1992. It led to panic attacks, a racing pulse, sleeplessness. “Whenever there was too much stress, the anxiety would become almost intolerable, like acid in the veins,” she recalled.

When a psychopharmacologist prescribed the drug Klonopin, everything brightened. “It just leveled me out,” Ms. Falstein said. “I had more energy. And it helped me sleep, which I was desperate for.”

After several months, however, the horrible symptoms returned. “My body became accustomed to half a milligram, and the drug stopped working,” she said. “So then I was up to one milligram. And then two.” Her doctor kept increasing the dosage and added Ativan to the mix.

Now 67, with her health and stamina in decline, Ms. Falstein has been diligently working to wean herself from both medications, part of the class called benzodiazepines that is widely prescribed for insomnia and anxiety. “They turn on you,” she said.

For years, geriatricians and researchers have sounded the alarm about the use of benzodiazepines among older adults. Often called “benzos,” the problem drugs include Valium (diazepam), Klonopin (clonazepam), Xanax (alprazolam) and Ativan (lorazepam).

The cautions have had scant effect: Use of the drugs has risen among older people, even though they are particularly vulnerable to the drugs’ ill effects. Like Ms. Falstein, many patients take them for years, though they’re recommended only for short periods. The chemically related “Z-drugs – Ambien, Sonata and Lunesta – present similar risks.

Now the opioid epidemic has generated fresh warnings, because pain relievers like Vicodin (hydrocodone with Tylenol) and OxyContin (oxycodeone) are also frequently prescribed for older people. When patients take both, they’re at risk for overdosing.

“Why are opioids dangerous? They stop you from breathing, and they have more power to do that when you’re also taking a benzo,” said Keith Humphreys, a Stanford University researcher and co-author of a disturbing editorial about overuse and misuse of benzodiazepines last month in the New England Journal of Medicine.

Numbers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention tell the story: In 1999, it tallied just 63 benzodiazepine-related deaths among those aged 65 and older. Almost 29 percent also involved an opioid. By 2015, benzo deaths in that age group had jumped to 431, with more than two-thirds involving an opioid. (Beno-related deaths in all age groups totaled 8,791.) In 2016, the Food and Drug Administration issued a black-box warning about co-prescribing benzodiazepines and opioids, including those in cough products.

Even patients taking the drugs exactly as prescribed can unwittingly wind up in this situation, since both sleep problems and chronic pain occur more frequently at older ages. “A psychiatrist puts a woman on Xanax,” Dr. Humphreys said. “Then she hurts her hip, so her primary care physician prescribes Vicodin.”

But fatal overdoses, which are a comparatively tiny number given the size of the older population, represent just one of many timeless concerns about these medications.

“Set aside the opioid issue,” said Michael Schoenbaum, an epidemiologist at the National Institutes for Health. “Way too many older Americans are getting benzos. And of those, many, more than half, are getting them for prolonged periods. That’s just bad practice. They have serious consequences.”

Probably the most serious: falls and fractures, already a common danger for older people, because benzos can cause dizziness. They’re also associated with auto accidents, given that they cause drowsiness and fatigue.

Moreover, “they have a negative effect on memory and other cognitive function,” says Dr. Donovan Maust, a psychiatrist at the Veterans Affairs Ann Arbor Health Care System. Some studies have shown an association with dementia, though experts call the evidence to date inconclusive.

Yet when Dr. Maust and his colleagues looked at a broad national sample of older adults, they found that the proportion of primary care and psychiatry visits that resulted in benzo prescriptions rose from 5.6 percent in 2003 to 2005, to 8.7 percent just seven years later, including 11.5 percent of visits by patients older than 85.

A study by Dr. Schoenbaum as a co-author and published in JAMA Psychiatry reported nearly nine percent of adults aged 65 to 80 taking benzos in 2008.

In both studies, women used the drugs more than men.

Persuading older people that benzos can hurt them, and that alternative treatments like cognitive behavioral therapy and improved sleep hygiene can be as effective for insomnia, though they take longer, has proved an uphill fight.

Some people take benzos for years without increasing the dose, so describing them as “dependent” or “habituated,” let alone “addicted,” often causes angry reactions.

Continued on insert page
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**By Victoria Passier**
**Senior Center Poetry Group**

**Mystery of Wild Sage**

Mystery of beguiling sage, I cut down your woody stalks last fall, not a trace of you left. Yet this spring, I check the herb garden to find a sprig of you alive and hardy, under lavender leaves all dried and splayed. But not you.

Your gray, green elongated oval leaves improvise a comeback. You are salvia tickling the lemon verbena sprouts with your healing heart, reminding me that you would be a subtle star of the day in November’s Thanksgiving turkey.

And why did I dig you up anyway?

I sit here marveling at your sturdy appearance. My winter-scarred heart feels healed. Our Mahican people burned you in their smudge huts to purify the spirit, body and soul. Made into a tea, you soothed the “sick of the world” stomach aches our forefathers knew well.

We need you still.

Your flavoring brought out the glory of whatever food you touched. How could I be so cruel as to cut you out of my garden? Once wild, you were cultivated for our own purposes. You were an antibiotic before penicillin and a soother of sore throats. Just the velvet feel of you brings comfort. The silent, old fashioned scent of you says “all will be well.”

And who knows what is waiting for you in our modern medical catalogue. They say you may hold the “Alzheimer’s key.” And I would rip you from your chosen place?

I quietly leave this sprig to latch onto more life, to root away and grow to live another day. I promise I will not cut you down.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00 Advanced Osteo</td>
<td>Woodworking</td>
<td>8:30 Foot Clinic (by appt)</td>
<td>9:00 Beginner Osteo</td>
<td>9:00 Knitting</td>
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<td>10:00 The Councillman is In!</td>
<td>10:00 Chess 10:30 Meditation</td>
<td>9:00 Woodworking, Beginner Osteo</td>
<td>9:00 Ceramics</td>
<td>9:00 Pitch</td>
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<td>10:00 Poetry</td>
<td>12:00 Tai Chi w/Weights</td>
<td>10:30 Tai Chi</td>
<td>12:30 Chair Caning</td>
<td>11:00 Comedy Dungeon</td>
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<td>10:00 Brand New Line Dancing</td>
<td>12:00 SHINE</td>
<td>12:00 25th Anniversary Senior Luncheon</td>
<td>1:15 Tai Chi w/weights</td>
<td>12:30 Quilting, Woodcarving</td>
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<td>10:30 “Shake Your Soul”</td>
<td>1:00 Bridge, Canasta!</td>
<td>1:00 Scrapping &amp; Cardmaking</td>
<td>1:00 Bingo</td>
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<td>11:00 Ladies Pool</td>
<td>1:30 From Stage to Screen</td>
<td>1:35 Yoga</td>
<td>1:15 Tai Chi w/weights</td>
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<td>12:00 Scrabble 12:00 Pinochle</td>
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