

# SeniorMatters

## CAN EVIDENCE-BASED HEALTHY LIVING PROGRAMS REALLY HELP?



Many programs are described as being “evidence-based” but what does this really mean? The Center for Healthy Aging at the National Council on Aging (NCOA) says that evidence-based programming translates tested program models or interventions into practical, effective community programs that can provide proven health benefits to participants. The evidence is evaluated by the CDC (Center for Disease Control), and they are based on research and provide an ideal model for giving older adults this information and support.

In terms of health outcomes, some outstanding results have occurred when a commitment is made to any of the 6-week chronic disease self-management programs - small group education workshops developed at Stanford University for management of arthritis, diabetes, heart disease, other conditions. Benefits include reduced pain and fatigue, improved range of motion, increased physical activity, elevated mood,

improved psychological well-being and increased confidence in managing health. Health reform efforts, including the formation of accountable care organizations and patient centered medical homes, are driving the need for more wellness programs, particularly among older adults.

In Lexington and surrounding communities, Minuteman Senior Services offers these programs free to participants, thanks to private grant funding. We work in partnership with Councils on Aging, hospitals and physician practices, and other groups to help patients prevent falls and better manage chronic conditions like diabetes and heart failure.

Each 6 week educational program is designed to help people develop the skills and confidence to manage their health condition, and is facilitated from a highly detailed manual by two leaders who have been trained and certified. Self-management helps reduce disease symptoms and improves quality of life,

helping people be more active and independent, and active partners in their health. Techniques are taught to deal with pain, fatigue and physical limitations, and skills like goal-setting, problem-solving, and overcoming barriers are demonstrated. As class size is limited, group participants benefit not only from the evidence-based information provided, but also from the camaraderie that discussing challenges and offering support to others brings. Here are some of the evidence based programs available.

**My Life, My Health - Chronic Disease Self Management** This workshop provides tools and support for individuals living with chronic health conditions such as Diabetes, Arthritis, Heart Disease, COPD, Parkinson’s, Hypertension, Asthma and more. Topics covered include healthy eating and exercise, problem solving, ways to deal with pain, fatigue and stress, and working effectively with healthcare providers.

**Chronic Pain Self Management** This workshop provides tools and support for healthy living for individuals living with chronic pain such as arthritis, fibromyalgia or pain due to injury. Topics covered include techniques to deal with problems such as frustration, fatigue and isolation; appropriate exercise, appropriate use of medications; and effective communication.

**Diabetes Self Management** This workshop teaches techniques to help manage the symptoms of diabetes, appropriate use of medications, healthy eating, exercise for maintaining and improving endurance, and working effectively with healthcare providers.

**A Matter of Balance - Fall Prevention** This program is designed to reduce the fear of falling, help prevent falls, and increase activity levels among older adults with exercises designed to increase core strength and balance. **Powerful Tools for Caregivers** This program provides tools and strate-

gies to better handle the unique challenges faced by family caregivers. Topics covered include self-care behaviors, management of emotions, self-efficacy and use of community resources.

**Healthy Eating for Successful Living** This is for older adults who want to learn more about nutrition and how lifestyle changes can promote better health. Based on the USDA MyPlate, the main components of the program include: goal setting, problem solving, group support, nutrition education, self assessment and management of dietary patterns.

Each May, our nation celebrates Older Americans Month to recognize older Americans for their contributions and provide them with information to help them stay healthy and active. This year, the focus is on injury prevention with the theme Safe Today Healthy Tomorrow, and these free evidence-based classes can make a difference.

Minuteman Senior Services is a non-profit agency serving Lexington and 15 surrounding communities. Visit [www.minutemansenior.org](http://www.minutemansenior.org) or call toll-free 888-222-6171 for more information.

Submitted by Patti Dubielak, Director of Marketing and Development, Minuteman Senior Services

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