Your Relationships

Reminiscence: Tying Past to Present

All people anticipate future events and “thing back through” their past experiences. Throughout life, we draw upon events in the past to attempt to cope with the ever-changing realities in our world. We use past experiences to illuminate problems of the present.

Reminiscence or life review is one of the primary tools for carving out who we are and what our existence means.

Young parents review their social life before they became parents: “Remember the time we drove to Atlanta just for dinner?” The middle-aged adult may recall the job promotion: “When they called me in for that interview, I was really nervous.” The older adult may spend time remembering a significant event: “During the depression...”

While the young child may be considered “cute,” the older adult may be considered “a bore who dwells on the past.” We tend to associate reminiscing among seniors as symptomatic of a problem rather than the normal behavior it is. Many older people avoid talking about the past so others won’t regard them as “senile.”

Reminiscing with another person or in a group can be therapeutic because the process of sharing memories helps individuals achieve a sense of integrity and self worth. Reminiscing serves several functions for the senior including:

- promoting self understanding
- preserving personal and collective history;
- transcending the material world and physical limitations;
- allowing for identification of universal themes of humanity; and
- reinforcing coping mechanisms.

Opening the door to the past can begin with such questions as: “Tell
me about your family” or “Tell me about the work you’ve done during your life.” Questions that are “open-ended” are the most useful in drawing out a person’s thoughts. These questions cannot be answered with a mere yes or no. They require greater elaboration which allows the listener to add experiences or ask additional questions.

The listener’s own curiosity and genuine interest is the key to finding questions which draw out a person’s thoughts and experiences. What is it that you would like to know about this individual? Are there common experiences such as marriage, work, the first car you owned, or the depression that can be discussed?

Reminiscing may focus on the person’s life in great detail from the early years through the present. What is important to remember in opening these doors to the past is that not all memories will be pleasant. Be sensitive to those subjects that a person would rather not discuss. You may want to ask if the person wishes to continue talking about the subject another time. Respect the person’s right to privacy, but on the other hand, be available if the person wants to reopen the subject. Confidentiality is very important to maintain. Gossiping with friends about a difficult point in a person’s life will cause you to forfeit any trust you have gained.

Some seniors “remember” events that never really happened. The brain can play tricks on us that way. You may want to try to correct the senior’s memory, or just let it be – use your judgment.

Reminiscence helps individuals sum up their life, put the various pieces in order and better understand today’s world of rapid change.

It is valuable for everyone since it helps preserve individual and family memories.

Adapted from J. Warren Texas Extension Service, 1998.
Telephone Scams and Seniors

If you’re an “older” consumer, age 60 or more, be careful about buying things by telephone. You may be a special target of those selling bogus products and services.

It’s easy enough to fall prey. Telemarketing fraud is a multi-billion dollar business in the United States. Every year, thousands of consumers lose from a few dollars to their life savings to telephone con artists.

To protect yourself when you get a sales offer by phone, follow these simple rules:

- Don’t buy by phone from unfamiliar companies
- Always take your time making a decision.

Legitimate businesses that sell by phone understand this. Remember: most people who lose money in telemarketing scams never see a penny of it again.

FOR MORE HELP

1. Before you buy from an unfamiliar organization, check it out first with some of these groups. (Your local phone directory has phone numbers and addresses.)
   - National Fraud Information Center (Call toll-free 1-800-876-7060) Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. EST)
   - State Attorney General
   - Better Business Bureau
   - Local consumer protection organization

2. Check national charities with these groups:
   - **Philanthropic Advisory Service**
     Council of Better Business Bureaus
     4200 Wilson Boulevard
     Arlington, VA 22203-1804
     703-276-0100
   - **National Charities Information Bureau**
     19 Union Square West
     NY, NY 10003 212-929-6300

3. To avoid unwanted telephone sales call from many national marketers, send your name, address, and telephone number to:
   - **Direct Marketing Association**
     Telephone Preference Service
     P.O. Box 9014
     Farmingdale, NY 11735-9014

4. Under the Telephone Consumer Protection Act of 1991, you can request that companies put you on their “do not call” lists. If the company calls you again, you can bring an action in Small Claims Court.

Source: FTC/AARP Brochure
New Calcium Recommendations

Recently the National Academy of Sciences released a new report recommending higher calcium intakes for older Americans. New research indicates that as we get older we may need more calcium and Vitamin D. For men and women over age 19 but under age 50, the recommended daily intake is 1000 milligrams of calcium instead of the current 800 milligrams. For those over age 50, the new recommendation is 1,200 milligrams per day.

There is also concern that many Americans are not getting enough Vitamin D. Two research studies in Boston found that over 40 percent of older patients had inadequate Vitamin D stores. This problem increased their risk for osteoporosis.

What can you do? First, increase your intake of calcium-rich foods. The chart gives the calcium content of many common foods. Next, get more exposure to the sun to increase the manufacture of Vitamin D in your skin. This does not mean baking yourself for hours. That would increase risk for skin cancer. Instead leave off the sun screen for about 15 minutes per day and expose your hands, arms and legs to the sun. If the sun is weak or you cannot get outside, a vitamin supplement with about 400-800 International Units (I.U.) of Vitamin D per day may be needed. You may also need a calcium supplement if you cannot get enough calcium in your diet. Some calcium supplements also contain Vitamin D.

But this is not a calcium-Vitamin D free-for-all. Too much of either nutrient is just as bad as too little. The National Academy of Sciences recommends an upper limit of 2,500 milligrams a day of calcium and 2,000 I.U. of Vitamin D. Too much calcium can increase risk for kidney stones and impair absorption of iron, zinc and magnesium. Too much Vitamin D would lead to calcification of kidneys and arteries which could hurt your circulation, heart and kidneys.
As with all nutrients, balance is the key. We are learning more and more about nutrition and the older person. Expect more specific nutrition recommendations on nutrition and exercise for the older population in the next few years.

**Pudding-Yogurt Parfait**

1 package instant sugar-free pudding mix, any flavor (4-serving size)
2 cups skim milk
1½ cups plain non-fat yogurt

1. Combine pudding mix and milk according to package directions.
2. Once pudding thickens, place one layer of pudding in each of four glass parfait dishes. Add layer of yogurt. Repeat layers one more time ending with yogurt.
3. Eat immediately or chill until ready to serve. 4 servings

**Nutrition Information:**
- Calories: 125
- Fat: 1 gram
- Carbohydrate: 19 grams
- Protein: 10 grams
- Cholesterol: 4 milligrams
- Sodium: 412 mg.

**Calcium and Vitamin D Sources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Item</th>
<th>Calcium Content (mg)</th>
<th>Vitamin D Content I.U.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Milk, skim or 2%, 1 cup</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yogurt, low fat, 1 cup</td>
<td>250-350</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low lactose milk, 1 cup</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcium-fortified orange juice 1 cup</td>
<td>300-350</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheese, 1 oz.</td>
<td>200-280</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cottage cheese, ½ cup</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low fat or fat free ice cream or frozen yogurt</td>
<td>150-300</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salmon with bones, 2 oz.</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collards, ½ cup</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kale, ½ cup</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broccoli, ½ cup</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total cereal, 3/4 cup</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear Friend:

SENIOR SENSE is a quarterly publication provided by your local county Extension Service office. It is prepared by Extension Family & Consumer Sciences specialists at The University of Georgia specifically for the educational needs of older Georgians.

Please contact your local Extension Service office for more information on these and related topics.

Putting Knowledge to Work

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Gale A. Buchanan, Dean and Director