



Home Care Services for Seniors

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www.readyhands.com

October—December 2004

News for Clients and Friends

To Our Clients and Friends...

As this issue of our newsletter "goes to press", Ready Hands celebrates its second anniversary providing home care services to clients in Fairfax County, Arlington and Alexandria. Since opening for business on October 1, 2002, we have enjoyed the great rewards of providing needed services to numerous seniors and persons with disabilities in our area.

We have also passed milestones that seemed a distant dream when we started. And,

we have learned so much—about running a small business; about the capacities for dedication and warmth we see exemplified in our employees every day; and, about the courage and love that families display as they fight to maintain the quality of life of an elderly or disabled loved one.

Thanks to all of those who have made these rewarding first years possible!

Granger Benson, M.D.

Sue Benson, R.N.

Ready Hands Home Care in Our Community

Ready Hands recognizes that as a senior-serving business we have a responsibility to contribute to the communities in which we live and work. We do this in various different ways. Here are some upcoming examples.

Ready Hands Home Care Volunteers its Services at World of Possibilities Expo

Ready Hands has volunteered to provide personal assistance services at the World of Possibilities Disabilities Expo, to be held at the Dulles Expo Center October 22-24. The Expo will provide an opportunity for an estimated 6,000 to 10,000 attendees to explore a vast array of products and services, such as:

assistive and adaptive technology, durable medical equipment, computer software, mobility products, living aids and more. The Expo is appropriate for individuals of all ages who face functional limitations.

Dr. Benson Featured on "NARFE Presents"

Dr. Benson will be featured in a televised interview by Fairfax NARFE Chapter President Walter Engel. The program airs on December 4 at 10:00 a.m. on Channel 10, the Fairfax County Access Cable channel. The program will cover various health issues of interest to seniors, including osteoporosis, falls, medication problems and other topics.

"NARFE" is the National Association of Retired Federal Employees, an organization that represents and promotes the interests of both retired and active federal civil servants.

Heather Robison Receives Quarterly Recognition Award

This quarter our award goes to Home Companion Heather Robison. Heather joined Ready Hands in July 2003. Since then she has embodied the key qualities Ready Hands looks for in employees, including a cheerful attitude, timeliness, industriousness, excellent communication and good work effort.



Heather goes the extra mile to reflect well on Ready Hands, and more than one new client has sought our services either directly or indirectly due to Heather's work. We sincerely thank Heather for being such a great employee!

Ready Hands Home Care to Present at Lifetime Learning Institute

Plans are underway for Dr. Benson to participate in a multi-session program at the Institute dealing with independent living challenges and solutions for seniors. The Lifetime Learning Institute of Northern Virginia is a non-profit, member-run organization dedicated to providing continuing education opportunities to older adults. It is sponsored by Northern Virginia Community College.

Ready Hands is excited about the opportunity to participate in the program, which is scheduled for next Spring. We will publicize more details about dates and locations as they become available.

It's Never Too Late To Start A Healthy Lifestyle

A quartet of articles in the September 22/29, 2004 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) prove again that healthy lifestyle behaviors pay off big, even late in life.

In one study from Europe, 1507 apparently healthy men and 832 women aged 70 to 90 were monitored for over ten years. Adherence to a Mediterranean diet, physical activity, non-smoking and moderate alcohol use were associated with reductions in the combined risk of death from all causes. The rates of death from cancer and cardiovascular disease were similarly lowered. If all four of the low risk factors were present, the death rate was lowered by more than half.

An Italian study in the same issue of JAMA reported specifically on the benefits of a Mediterranean diet. Such a diet is rich in whole grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts and olive oil. Study subjects exhibited significantly fewer markers of metabolic syndrome, a disorder known to greatly increase the risk of cardiovascular disease, as compared with

a control group of subjects who consumed a "prudent" diet.

Two more articles addressed the effects of exercise on the development of dementia. In the first, 18,766 women participant in the Nurses' Health Study, ages 70 to 81, were monitored over an extended period of years. The authors found that long-term regular exercise, including walking, was associated with significantly better mental function and less cognitive decline.

The second article on exercise and dementia reported on the effects of walking activity in 2257 men aged 71 to 93. Over the study period, men who walked the least (less than 0.25 miles per day) had a 1.8-fold increased chance of developing dementia as compared with men who walked the most (over 2 miles per day). In both this and the above study involving women, greater amounts of exercise achieved greater benefits.

The foregoing findings add to the already impressive evidence that exercise and a healthy diet achieve major health benefits, even in the elderly. It's never too late!

GERD: More Than Just Heartburn

More and more people are taking the very expensive "little purple pill" (Nexium), or one of its brothers: Aciphex, Protonix, Prevacid and over-the-counter Prilosec, known generically as omeprazole. The biggest reason: gastroesophageal reflux disease ("GERD" for short), a disorder that affects at least 15 million adults. Just how did GERD get to be such a big deal?

What Exactly IS GERD?

At the bottom of the esophagus, a specialized muscle called the lower esophageal sphincter (LES) prevents the backwash of acidic stomach contents into the esophagus. When it malfunctions occasionally, we recognize the symptom as heartburn: a burning sensation, perhaps accompanied by acid belch or a sour taste. Occasional heartburn certainly is not a big deal. But, if it happens weekly or more often, then GERD exists, and that can be much more serious.

Symptoms and Complications

The basic symptom of GERD is recurrent heartburn. Some people may also experience cough, choking, sore throat or hoarseness, resulting from the acid material entering the throat. Severe chest pain mimicking a heart attack can also occur.

Another serious complication is the formation of erosions and bleeding. Scar tissue and strictures in the esophagus can also complicate the picture. Finally, GERD can lead to a serious pre-cancerous tissue change in the lowermost esophagus. Called Barrett's esophagus, this tissue change increases the chances of developing esophageal adenocarcinoma. GERD is largely responsible for a sevenfold increase in esophageal cancer cases between 1970 and 2000.

Diagnosing GERD

For people with isolated heartburn, many physicians make the diagnosis without further testing. Everyone else requires at least an upper endoscopy, in which a lighted tube is passed into the esophagus to visualize the lining and obtain biopsies.

Many GERD sufferers have normal endoscopies. If the diagnosis remains uncertain, the next step is esophageal pH monitoring, in which a sensor is placed in the esophagus that measures the presence of acidity over a period of time.

Treatment

Lifestyle changes come first: avoid large meals; avoid lying down within two to three hours of eating; stop smoking; lose weight; and, skip chocolate, fatty foods, coffee and certain other foods that can relax the LES. Elevating the head of the bed on four to six-inch blocks is also helpful.

The cornerstone of treatment, however, is acid suppression. That's where the little purple pill and its brothers come in. These "proton pump inhibitors" block the "acid pumps" located in the millions of specialized stomach cells that secrete acid. Older drugs like Zantac, Pepcid and others also reduce acid production, but not nearly as well.

For patients who fail therapy with drugs and lifestyle measures, anti-reflux surgery is an option. Finally, there are several exciting new treatments for GERD that are performed via an endoscope.

The foregoing is extracted from an article by Dr. Benson appearing in the October, 2004 issue of the Fairfax County Golden Gazette. For more articles on topics of interest to seniors, log onto www.readyhands.com.