

Use it or Lose it

Part II: Body Fitness

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At age 80, Millie Johnson of Omaha, Nebraska, hasn't slowed down much, even after double knee replacements. She bakes, volunteers, and maintains her own home and yard, including a flower and vegetable garden. Her fountain of youth and the source of her boundless energy, she says, is exercise.

Johnson, a retired registered nurse, works out an hour a day, 3 times a week, at Immanuel Senior Living's AgeWell Center for Active Aging, a fully equipped fitness center for seniors. Although she's not a resident of Immanuel Village, where the fitness center is located, she is taking advantage of the center's open membership for anyone in her community over the age of 55.

"I think I'd be uncomfortable going where the big jocks work out," Johnson said as she prepared to begin a Friday afternoon workout on the weight machines and stationary bicycle. "I feel really comfortable here," she said, exchanging jabs with several familiar faces. "It's a social thing, too," she added.

So what does exercise help her do? "I feel ready to do anything," she said with a sparkle in her eyes. "I plan to go home and rake leaves later this afternoon. Yesterday I baked four loaves of bread and cookies for a funeral," said the widowed grandmother of three and great-grandmother of two.

Although she's reaped the benefits of the fitness center for 6 years, exercise was a particular



Move Over Bingo...There's a New Game in Town

With more seniors than ever who are tech savvy, youth no longer stakes a claim to video games. And while most don't think of video gaming as exercise, one new game is getting seniors back in action doing a sport many enjoyed in their younger years. Retirement and care communities all across the country are making the most of that trend, with the help of the international caregiving company Home Instead Senior Care.

Home Instead Senior Care launched its senior "mind games" public-education campaign in 2007 in the company's 700 North American markets. "The idea was to stress the importance of 'use it or lose it' to keep seniors more vital and active as they age," said Home Instead Senior Care Co-Founder and CEO Paul Hogan. "And one way to do that is through video games."

One of the most popular for seniors is Nintendo's new Wii™ home video game system—which allows players to interactively compete in sports such as bowling and golf. In bowling, for instance, the motion of the ball is controlled with a hand-held remote that players use while either sitting or standing. The campaign has encouraged franchise owners to help their local retirement and care communities organize Wii tournaments for seniors, an initiative that has spawned interesting partnerships in the US and Canada.

Kathi Greco, director of community relations for Sunrise Senior Living in Westlake, OH, worked with the local Home Instead Senior Care franchise office owned by Geoffrey

Moore to host Wii tournaments in senior centers and an area mall.

"One wheelchair-bound man who had been active in bowling tournaments and couldn't participate anymore came to the tournament at the mall," she said. "The look on his face when he would get a strike was heartwarming. The crowd at the senior center, on the other hand, was active and included couples that had bowled together with their friends during their married lives. It was a lot of fun to see them competing. The people at the senior center and their activities director have been requesting that we return and do it again."

Indianapolis-area Home Instead Senior Care Franchise Owner Anthony Smith has helped host nearly 20 tournaments in at least 7 care communities. The tournaments have been quite a media draw as well. "The residents were skeptical at first because it's new technology that's helping them do an old-time pastime. But that skepticism turned to pure joy. Some are reluctant to stop bowling," he said.

"We held one tournament in a hospital rehab brain-injury unit with patients who suffered from varied injuries. They all were still able to participate. The device is simple enough for most seniors."

Home Instead Senior Care Franchise Owner Chris Barr of Harrisburg, PA, who has hosted tournaments in about 6 senior care centers and assisted living facilities, said most gratifying is the joy that he's witnessed firsthand. "The seniors' competitive spirit came alive and

you could see the cognitive skills kicking in," said Barr, who is planning to organize Wii tournaments for care communities to compete against each other. "We plan to treat it as an ongoing sport, and what's great is you can do it with 3 feet of snow on the ground."

Home Instead Senior Care Franchise Owner Eric Wiedemann of Buffalo, NY, who sits on the advisory board of Tennyson Court Senior Care Community, said that the care community had just purchased a Wii and was discussing how to use it when his company's campaign debuted.

"I think I provided some added emphasis that seniors nationwide are doing this, and that it is a good way to enhance activity as well as memory," Wiedemann said.

"We got several individuals to participate who previously would only come down for bingo," said Paul Coolican, Tennyson Court Senior Care Community Executive Director. "The 4 resident houses competed against each other, with the winning house receiving a pizza party. The highest score winner was a resident with memory impairment," Coolican noted. "It was a nice social event and activity. The families all heard about it and they thought it was a great idea," he added.

"I think it's really about seniors being able to do something they enjoyed in their past and left behind, and are able to participate in again," said Sunrise Senior Living's Kathi Greco. "There wasn't anyone who said they couldn't do it."

advantage when she had one knee replaced in June 2006 and a second in June 2007. "It was so much easier than I expected," she said of the surgeries. "I did a lot of my rehabilitation here at the fitness

center." As proof, she said she was driving 2 weeks after her second knee replacement.

Numerous studies help explain Millie Johnson's phenomenal success with exercise as a boost not

only for the body but the mind as well. Here are a few:

- Researchers at Columbia University Medical Center, in a study published in 2007, discovered that exercise targets a re-

More Seniors Are Tech Savvy

More seniors are embracing the video game technology age. Consider the following:

- The second-annual “Evercare 100 @ 100 Survey,” sponsored by the company Evercare, polled 100 Americans turning 100 or older in 2007 about their practices and habits and found that 1 in 7 has played video games.¹
- *The New York Times* reported earlier in 2007 that PopCap Games in Seattle says its video games have been downloaded more than 200 million times since the company was founded in 2000. A spokesman said that the company was stunned by results of a customer survey, which found that 47% of players were older than 50 years.²

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gion of the brain within the hippocampus, known as the dentate gyrus, which underlies normal age-related memory decline that begins around age 30 for most adults. In short, this study suggests that physical activity helps build this section of the brain, which is critical to the maintenance of memory.¹

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in collaboration with the Alzheimer’s Association and other partners, has released a report titled, *The Healthy Brain Initiative: A National Public Health Road Map to Maintaining Cognitive Health*. The report reveals that physical activity, control of hypertension, and engagement in social activities may help adults maintain cognitive health.²
- According to a 2006 study in the *Journal of Gerontology: Medical Sciences*, an exercise program can improve the health of elderly people who have been previously inactive. The *Effects of a Physical Activity Intervention on Measures of Physical Performance* (abstract), indicates that regular exercise may lower elderly patients’

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chances of major walking disabilities. The research revealed that an integrated exercise program that includes aerobic, strength, balance, and flexibility exercises can increase walking ability among individuals ages 70 to 89.³

Retirement community staff members have witnessed the value of exercise as well. All of Immanuel Senior Living’s 6 campuses feature wellness centers, according to Wellness Manager Rachel Hoeck. More than 60 seniors a day work out at the center where Millie Johnson exercises—a combina-

tion of older adults from the retirement community and local area. Even more take exercise classes. “The fitness centers have proven to be a great outreach for the retirement community,” Hoeck said.

“I think we’re really attractive to people over 55 because we’re a safe and social environment. And we have a trained and certified staff to set up a program for their individual needs,” she said. “We focus on functional activities that give individuals the skills and opportunities to live life to the fullest.”

In addition to a full fitness room, Immanuel’s exercise offerings include a walking club, and tai chi, yoga, line dancing, and balance-enhancing classes. “Our most popular is a low-impact aerobics class. People really enjoy it and get excited to see the difference in their strength and balance.”

Hoeck said the fitness center has benefits that carry over into other aspects of seniors’ lives. “Not only will seniors get the advantages of exercise, but they’ll socialize and form new friendships. And because they’re exercising, they may find they’re able to interact more with their grandkids.”

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