

HEART BEAT

Newsletter of the Cardiovascular Health Study ~ Spring 2005

"CHS All Stars": A New Study and a New Visit

By Diane Ives, MPH, University of Pittsburgh

During the past few months, we have been reminded of how wonderful it is to call and visit with longtime companions and friends. CHS began in 1989, and we have all grown to think of our participants as friends and family. We hope you feel the same about our faithful staff. The CHS phone calls we make to you every six months are a terrific way to keep in touch and see how you are doing. However, nothing replaces a personal visit and a face-to-face chat.

With that in mind, we are pleased to announce that the National Institute on Aging, part of the National Institutes of Health, also wants us to see you in person! They have provided us with the financial support to conduct a new

study called *CHS All Stars* that will allow us to see you one more time. We will visit you in your home, or, if you'd prefer, you may travel to the clinic to see us. We will ask you a few questions about your health, and we will have some tasks and measures for you to complete.

In addition, we will also call you every six months to ask you a few follow-up questions. These calls will be very similar to the ones CHS staff have been making for many years.

Over the next six months, the clinic staff at your local site will be contacting you about the visit and scheduling an appointment. We hope you are as excited as we are about this chance to visit. See you soon! ♥

Keeping in Touch with Our "Super Healthy" CHS Participants

According to the 2004 National Vital Statistics Report published by the Centers for Disease Control, children born in 2002 can expect to live 77.3 years. Not too shabby. But get this: Today, the average age of CHS participants is 85! Talk about the greatest generation!

You have been dubbed the "super-healthy." That means that for some reason—your genes, your lifestyle, your diet, or some other long-life secret you possess—you are living an unusually long and healthy life.



It is for that reason that we'd like to continue contacting you every six months. We'll ask the "usual questions": How are you feeling? What medications have you been taking? Have you been in the hospital? (And, with your permission, we'll also continue to collect your medical records.)

The answers to these questions give us the information we need to better understand why some people age so successfully.

Thank you for being so patient with us and so generous with your time! ♥

CHS: A National Treasure

By Anne B. Newman, MD, MPH, University of Pittsburgh

In 2004, CHS findings were reported in two special issues of the *Journal of the American Society for Geriatric Cardiology*. The findings were also presented at the 2004 meeting of the American Heart Association. The consensus: CHS is considered a "National Treasure" for the contributions it has made and will continue to make in the future.

CHS focused on determining when (or if) participants experienced any of the cardiovascular "events" listed below:

- *myocardial infarction* - damage to the heart muscle caused by decreased flow of oxygen-rich blood to the heart
- *angina* - chest pain caused by decreased flow of oxygen-rich blood to the heart
- *stroke* - damage to the brain caused by bleeding in the brain or decreased flow of oxygen-rich blood to the brain
- *transient ischemic attack (TIA)* - an episode of symptoms similar to a stroke but lasting only a few minutes or hours
- *congestive heart failure* - decreased ability of the heart to pump blood
- *peripheral artery disease* - poor circulation in the arteries of the legs, arms, and trunk

Over the years, as participants started to have these events, we examined lifestyle, behavior, diet, and health history factors that were associated with the events. By now, you're probably quite familiar with what we've learned about cardiovascular disease (CVD) in older adults, but it's worth repeating a few of the highlights:

Physical activity, low to moderate levels of alcohol consumption, and not smoking appear

to make a big difference in healthy aging. Drugs that lower cholesterol are also important in lowering the risk of heart disease. High blood pressure and diabetes increase the risk of CVD. And, no matter what your other risk factors are, simply getting older increases the risk of CVD for almost everyone.

Today, a doctor who specializes in the prevention and treatment of CVD can expect the majority of his or her patients to be over the age of 65. CVD in seniors is different from CVD in the middle-aged. As the number of seniors increases—and because they're living longer—CHS is in the unique position of being able to provide doctors with information about health and disease in our oldest citizens. This is especially important for women, most of whom do not even begin to show signs of CVD until they are in their 70s and 80s.

Over the past ten years, doctors have been using many different drugs to help their patients prevent and live with CVD. Drugs that lower cholesterol, keep high blood pressure in check, and keep platelets from forming blood clots are all important weapons in the fight against CVD. CHS has been—and will continue to be—a leader in helping doctors understand how to best use these drugs for a unique group of people: older adults.

The importance and recognition of the Cardiovascular Health Study continues to grow, and our work will continue for many years. Because of some of the pioneering work we have done, new studies have been born that will take up where CHS has left off. These new studies will join CHS in continuing to improve the lives and health of older adults.

Thank you for making this possible. ♥

Email and the Internet: More Seniors Are Getting Online

By Maggie Williams, CHS Heartbeat editor

A few years ago, I gave my dad my old computer. We got it set up in his office and went over some of the basics. He contacted an Internet service provider (ISP), and they got him hooked up to the Internet. He selected his email address and checked out a couple of "how-to" books from the library. And, just like that, my dad joined the growing ranks of seniors who have decided to get online. Maybe you can, too.

According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 22% of people over 65 use the Internet (up from just 2% in 1996). Although the number of "wired" seniors is relatively low, their enthusiasm is not: Once seniors get online, they are just as likely as their younger counterparts to send email, do Internet research, and "surf the web."

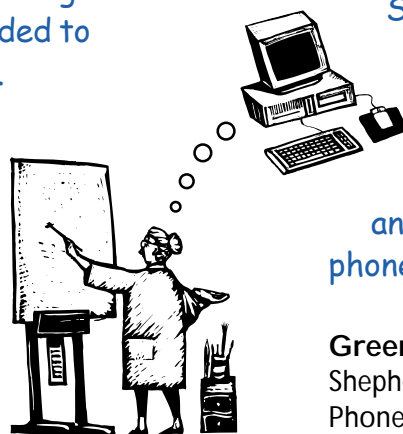
That's the good news. The not-so-good news is that getting hooked up to the Internet can be difficult for many seniors. First of all, many seniors, like a lot of other people who are not online, simply cannot afford a computer or the monthly Internet access charge. Another big obstacle for seniors is the technology itself. According to Tobey Dichter, founder of *Generations Online*, "Access, skill, and intimidation are the barriers—and the greatest of these is intimidation." But if you want to get wired, there are ways around these obstacles.

For starters, let's assume that you don't have any computer experience. Many community colleges and libraries offer computer classes. These classes can get you up-to-speed on

computer basics and help you learn about the Internet and email.

In addition to library and community college classes, I've listed several places that offer computer classes through a program called **SeniorNet**. These classes are *for seniors only*, and they are taught by seniors.

SeniorNet has over 240 computer learning centers throughout the United States. If one of the centers listed below is not near you, contact SeniorNet to find out if there's another learning center in your area. Their phone number is **415-495-4990**.



Greensboro, NC
 Shepherd's Center
 Phone: 336-378-0766
 Contact: Jean Eason

Pittsburgh PA
 Carnegie Library
 Phone: 412-281-2439
 Contact: Terri Brown

Pittsburgh, PA
 SeniorNet Learning Center
 Phone: 412-346-4115, ext. 318
 Contact: Terri Brown, Jim Watenpool

Sacramento, CA
 Ethel MacLeod Hart Senior Center
 Phone: 916-264-5462
 Contact: Linda Hoschler

Sacramento, CA
 Phone: 916-485-9572
 Contact: Edith Buth, Joe D'Alexander

Gaithersburg, MD
 Jewish Communal Appeal at Asbury Methodist Village
 Phone: 301-255-4217
 Contact: Robert Nisbet

Just a few of
 the over 240
 SeniorNet
 Learning centers
 in the U.S.



For those of you who cannot afford or choose not to enroll in computer or Internet classes, **Generations on Line** might be for you.

Generations on Line (GoL) is a non-profit organization whose sole mission is to help seniors get *free* access to email and the Internet. GoL supplies special computer software to senior centers, libraries, retirement homes, or any other place where seniors might congregate. The software teaches seniors to send email and introduces them to some selected websites. The software provides all the instructions, and you don't have to have *any* computer experience to use it.

Seniors can also participate in a GoL program called *Generation to Generation*. This program gives students in classrooms all over the

country a chance to learn from people who have lots of life experience. For instance, a class that's studying the Depression, WWII, or the March on Washington can email seniors and ask them questions about those topics. Who better to answer questions than the people who were there?

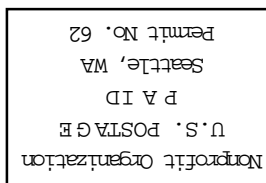
If you're interested in GoL, contact your local library, senior center, or retirement center. Ask them if they subscribe to GoL. If they don't, you can ask them to contact GoL for information about the program. Their website address is www.generationsonline.com, and their phone number is 215-222-6400.

I sincerely hope that you'll be able to get access to email and the internet, if that's your cup of tea. Good luck! ♥

Are you already "on the 'Net'?"

If so, visit SeniorHealth, the health information website designed specifically for seniors: www.nihseniorhealth.gov. This website has information on several topics that might interest you, such as exercise, caring for someone with Alzheimer's, arthritis, and taking medicines.

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