

# vitality



## A passion for fitness can begin with small steps



TIMOTHY AGUIERO PHOTOGRAPHY

“

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—Al Johnson

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**AL JOHNSON** is a trim and fit 69-year-old who looks like he’s in peak health. But if you met him a couple of years ago, you might have had a different impression.

Back then, Johnson was packing an extra 40 pounds and his Group Health doctor said he was heading toward a diabetes diagnosis. That was the wake-up call for Johnson, who became determined to take charge of his health.

“I’d lost a lot of weight about 10 years before by dieting, but dieting alone wasn’t keeping the pounds off. I wasn’t moving enough, and I was getting stiff and creaky. It was harder to get out of chairs and cars—and getting out of a kayak seemed next to impossible,” says Johnson, who enjoys sea kayaking.

There’s no doubt that getting older leads to physical changes. Your metabolism slows, you lose flexibility and strength, and you may have aches and pains. But there is a lot you can do to maintain your health and age well.

Johnson decided to start by getting more exercise. With his doctor’s encouragement, he joined a SilverSneakers® fitness class (see page 2). “Starting out with a class—and a friendly, encouraging group of people—was a great way to get moving and to gradually increase my strength and flexibility,” he says.

His doctor’s recommendations included cutting back on carbs, so Johnson eliminated most of the bread, potatoes, and pasta in his diet, and bulked up on vegetables and meat. By combining regular exercise with a healthy diet, he lost more than 40 pounds in about six months. Under his doctor’s guidance, he was able to eliminate some of his medications entirely and cut back on others, and he greatly reduced his risk of diabetes.

As his physical condition improved, he began finding ways to make exercise more challenging—by gradually choosing heavier weights, doing more repetitions of exercises, and adding new exercises. Now he works out with a personal trainer a couple days a week—and is up to lifting 135 pounds.

“Walking uphill is a whole lot easier, I’m not as stiff, and I don’t get sleepy in the midafternoon anymore,” says Johnson. “I’m probably as fit as I’ve ever been in my life. Now my goals are to lose more weight and continue getting stronger.” ●

### 11 tips to help you age well

Your doctor has probably talked with you about ways to stay your healthiest as you age, but here’s a reminder of healthy habits that can keep you feeling your best.

#### 1. Move more

Even a little exercise can lower your risk of health problems like diabetes and heart disease. If you haven’t been active, walking is a great way to start. Work up to walking 30 minutes a day.

#### 2. Keep on the sunny side

Focus on what you’re grateful for in your life, rather than what you’re not. Talk to your doctor if you’re experiencing anxiety or depression. There are effective treatments.

#### 3. Eat well

Eat a variety of foods every day—whole grains, lean protein, fruits and vegetables, and cut back on foods with a lot of fat, salt, and sugar. Think of your healthy eating habits as a lifestyle, not a diet.

#### 4. Watch your weight

Losing just 5 or 10 percent of your body weight will lower your blood pressure and cholesterol—and your risk of heart disease, diabetes, and stroke. It can also reduce strain on your muscles and joints.

continued on page 2

Health or wellness or prevention information

Nonprofit Org  
US Postage  
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Seattle, WA  
Permit No 5203

Group Health Cooperative  
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Seattle, WA 98109-5233

## HOW TO CONTACT US

*Vitality* is a publication of Group Health. If you have feedback or questions about this publication, contact us at [nwhealth@ghc.org](mailto:nwhealth@ghc.org) or send to *Vitality*, Brand, Advertising & Creative Services, 320 Westlake Ave. N., Suite 100, Seattle, WA 98109

### QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH OR APPOINTMENTS

Call your doctor or health care team during office hours. If you receive your primary care at a Group Health clinic, press 4 when you call and enter your member ID number to be connected directly to your doctor or health care team.

### HANDY PHONE NUMBERS

Area codes 800, 866, and 888 are toll-free.

**Medicare Customer Service**  
206-901-4600 or  
1-888-901-4600

**Consulting Nurse Service**  
1-800-297-6877

### Pharmacy refills

Call your regular pharmacy, or receive your pharmacy refills by mail at no extra cost. Log on to [MyGroupHealth.com](http://MyGroupHealth.com) for Members at [ghc.org](http://ghc.org), and click on “Pharmacy Services.” Or call 1-800-245-7979 to order using our automated service.

**Complex Case Management**  
(no referral necessary)  
1-866-656-4183

**Behavioral Health Access Services**  
206-901-6300 or  
1-888-287-2680

**Group Health Eye Care**  
1-800-664-9225  
[gheyecare.org](http://gheyecare.org)

**Advance Directives Registry**  
Western WA: 1-877-850-9445  
Eastern WA: 509-241-7824

Group Health Cooperative is an HMO plan with a Medicare contract. Group Health Options, Inc. is a PPO plan with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in Group Health HMO and Group Health PPO depends on contract renewal.

# 11 steps to healthy aging

continued from page 1

## 5. Keep up with preventive care

Immunizations and preventive care screenings can help you stay well and catch health problems early. Talk to your doctor about your personal screening schedule. It will depend on your age and risk factors.

## 6. Kick the tobacco habit

If you're still smoking or chewing, quitting will give your health a big boost. No need to do it alone. Check out Quit For Life®, one of the most effective quit programs around.

## 7. Drink more water

Drink at least six, 8-ounce glasses of water daily. Dehydration can lead to confusion, dizziness, light-headedness, and fatigue.

## 8. Go light on alcohol

Alcohol can impair your balance, judgment, and reflexes—and even interfere with your body's ability to absorb nutrients. Women should have no more than one drink a day, men no more than two.

## 9. Talk to your health care team

At your next well-care visit, be ready to discuss these health topics, and any others that are important to you—like intimacy issues, or bladder control. In the meantime, call your health care team or the Consulting Nurse Service if you have questions or concerns—or send a secure e-mail if you get care at a Group Health Medical Centers clinic.

## 10. Manage chronic conditions

Our Living Well with Chronic Conditions workshop—with in-person and online classes—gives you tools to stay on top of ongoing health issues like diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, and chronic pain.

## 11. Get enough sleep

All adults need six to eight hours of sleep a night for peak health. Lack of sleep depresses the immune system, increases confusion, affects mood and concentration, and can lead to falls.

## NEWS & TIPS

### ● Fitness class options

SilverSneakers® and EnhanceFitness® are fitness classes that meet at participating fitness clubs, senior centers, and community centers across Washington state. Sessions last one hour and are led by specially trained instructors. To locate a class near you, just go to [ghc.org](http://ghc.org) and enter “fitness classes” in the search box.



### ● Learn about healthy aging with Senior Caucus

If you'd like to be more involved in the future of health care and learn about senior health and wellness, you're invited to attend a Senior Caucus health program.

Educational programs are held monthly, September through June, from 10–11:30 a.m. at the Capitol Hill Campus (201 16th Ave. E., Seattle), Main Building, room D649. Upcoming programs are on April 17, May 1, and June 5. Programs are followed by a bring-your-own lunch social hour. Executive committee meetings, open to the public, follow from 12:30–2 p.m.

Program topics vary and may include updates on relevant state legislation, health information such as preventing falls and improving balance, and other health topics such as options for care outside the home. Many programs feature health professionals.

The mission of Senior Caucus is to ensure that the Cooperative promotes healthy aging for its members.

The Caucus works to engage members in health promotion and wellness activities, and health policy, coverage, and legislative issues. The Senior Caucus is a Board-approved special interest group.

Learn more about Senior Caucus by e-mailing [governance@ghc.org](mailto:governance@ghc.org) or calling 206-448-2080 or 1-800-252-3305, ext. 12.

### ● Get help managing a chronic condition

Many people age 65 or over have at least one chronic health condition such as diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, depression, and others. You can get help managing your condition by signing up for a Living Well With Chronic Conditions workshop offered at locations in Western Washington. If you live elsewhere in the state, you can take the online version of this workshop, Better Choices, Better Health.

Find information about both options at [ghc.org](http://ghc.org) (enter “Living Well” in the search box), or call the Group Health Resource Line at 1-800-992-2279.

### ● Up to date on your vaccinations?

You may think that being an older adult means that you don't need any vaccinations, but adults often require booster shots. Check with your doctor to see if you're due for one. There are also two vaccinations specifically recommended for older adults:

- The pneumococcal vaccine, given once at age 65 or older
  - The shingles vaccine, given once at age 60 or older
- Finally, remember to get your flu vaccine each year.