

Senior Lifestyles

INSIDE: Kettlebell workout • Sensory losses • Doctor visits

A publication of the Addison Independent • October 21, 2021



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- 2 Contribute little at meetings, restaurants or family gatherings?
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Kettlebell class thrives even through the pandemic

Seniors share workouts and fellowship

By **ANDY KIRKALDY**

PANTON — Seventeen faithful attendees of a senior kettlebell workout class at Vintage Fitness Center in Vergennes were much chagrined when center owners Kimberly and Joel Palmer decided it was best to close operations after the COVID-19 pandemic struck in March 2020.

The members of the class, average age in the early 70s with the oldest in the mid-80s, understood the tough choice the Palmers had to make. But still they took the news hard.

“We had a group of us, the lower-impact older group, that were just devastated,” said Panton resident Janet Seaburg, 84. “We need that at our age.”

Vergennes resident Karen Quigley, 67, also remembered when she learned the Palmers shut down Vintage Fitness. Especially during the pandemic’s lockdown phase, she said missing the class was painful.

“I felt incredibly lost. This twice-a-week thing had been a way to get me out of the house, and I think the others

felt the same. We were together, and we were exercising,” Quigley said. “When everything came to a screeching halt, we all were lost. We didn’t know what to do.”

Then Seaburg had the brainstorm that first sparked the group into organizing their own self-directed classes: She offered her

Panton property on Button Bay as a workout site. It has room for all to observe masking and distancing recommendations.

“I live in this big house on the lake with a nice yard, and I have a three-car garage, and I can clean it and open all the doors,” she said. “So we came here last July 9, and we’ve had 126 classes since then.”

The fact that they have met that often is also thanks to another Seaburg idea. As the weather started to turn cold in the fall of 2020, she thought of the large dog training space at Comfort Hill Kennel in Vergennes, run by Linette Paquette.

“She said she has this huge dog obedience ring,” Seaburg said. “She’s been renting that space to us two days a week for an hour in the winter.”

“We’re all seniors, but probably half the group is 10 to 15 years older than I am (67). They’re inspiring. I want to be them when I’m that age.”

— Karen Quigley



CAROL SPENCER WORKS out with a kettlebell at one of the twice-weekly sessions held at the Comfort Hill Kennels in Vergennes. She is one of a 17 older women who formed a workout group at the start of the pandemic and are still at it. Independent photo/Steve James

Since the first workout on Seaburg’s lawn on July 9, between 13 and 17 members of the group have faithfully attended — and taken turns leading — the group workouts.

As well as kettlebells — weighing between 5 and 30 pounds depending on the strength and joint condition of the participants — Quigley said workouts incorporate cardio calisthenics, such as jogging in place and jumping jacks,

and core-strengthening exercises using resistance bands and exercise balls.

The variety creates a more complete and interesting workout, she said.

“It encompasses everything, and thanks to Kim and Joel Palmer we have the skills now. We know what we’re doing, and we know how to be safe,” Quigley said. “It just works for all of us.”

Workouts average about 14 people per (See Training, Page 16)

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Staying active, good fitting shoes will help prevent falls

By DR. EDWARD YOON

As we age, we begin to learn — sometimes firsthand — how devastating a fall can be. It isn't quite as easy as it once was to hop back up and continue on our way.

Each year millions of older adults experience falls and fall-related injuries. Vermont ranked No. 48 in a state-to-state comparison with 32.9% of adults age 65 and older reporting a fall in the past 12 months, according to recent data from the 2021 America's Health Rankings Senior Report.

About one in four people in the United States over age 65 reports falling each year. Among older adults, 1 out of 5 falls causes a serious injury, including 90% of hip fractures and 51% of traumatic brain injuries. Contributing factors for falls include poor balance, poor vision, certain medications, alcohol consumption, physical inactivity, osteoporosis, physical disabilities and general frailty.

Being aware of the risk factors and following these tips can reduce your chances of serious injury, and help you maintain and improve the quality of your health and remain independent.

• **Medications:** Any time you get a new prescription, ask your pharmacist or doctor about side effects like dizziness or drowsiness that can affect balance.

• **Review Your Health Benefits:**

As we approach the Medicare annual enrollment period in October, older adults should consider whether their current plan includes programs that can help reduce the chances of a fall.

• **Stay Active:** Do exercises that can strengthen your legs and improve balance.

• **Talk to Your Provider:** A health care provider can help assess and reduce your fall risk. Medicare-eligible individuals can access care through an Annual Wellness Visit, which is free to anyone on Medicare.

• **Footwear:** Make sure your shoes fit, have good traction, and are comfortable. See a doctor if you are experiencing foot pain.

• **Check Your Home:** Most falls happen at home. Remove clutter, fix steps that are uneven and make sure there is adequate lighting. Install grab bars and handrails in the bathroom and on stairways. Use a cane, walker, crutches or other support if needed.

Falls can present a more significant health threat than many may realize, but by understanding risk factors and how to reduce them, older adults can empower themselves to live healthier lives.

Editor's note: Dr. Edward Yoon is chief medical officer of UnitedHealthcare Medicare & Retirement of New England.



Watch your step!

“WARRIORS” MARY GORDON, left, and Joanne Ringer run through a footwork drill last Tuesday during one of their kettlebell workout sessions held regularly in Vergennes.

Independent photo/Steve James

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Family members should be aware of sensory losses in the elderly

BURLINGTON — 83% of older adults live with at least one form of sensory loss, according to a survey by Home Instead Inc. Sensory loss increases the risk of feeling isolated.

“Older adults living with limited or diminished senses are faced with the added stress and difficulties brought on by prolonged isolation from their loved ones,” said Lakelyn Hogan, Ph.D., gerontologist, and caregiver advocate at Home Instead. “And it’s especially important to consider their needs, as they may have an especially difficult time staying connected.”

Now more than ever, it is important for family members, caregivers and the community as a whole to be mindful of the signs of sensory loss and take proactive steps to ensure these individuals feel embraced and engaged.

Each of the five senses plays a role in keeping us connected to the world around us. When they are weakened, it can become difficult and frightening to navigate an environment that is not designed to accommodate impaired vision, hearing, mobility and more.

“Some older adults have been able to use video chats and phone calls to stay in touch (See *Sensory loss*, Page 17)



Range of motion

THE WARRIORS' KETTLEBELL workouts involve more than standing in place and deadlift heavy pieces of iron. Cherie Vachon, left, and Carol Spencer stretch while lifting weights during a recent work out at the Comfort Hill Kennels.

Independent photo/Steve James



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Training

(Continued from Page 13)

session. The group has grown close, and members call themselves The Warriors and own matching green T-Shirts.

“CAMARADERIE & CORE TRAINING”

Why do they keep coming back for more? For both healthy exercise and friendship.

“(It’s) the camaraderie and the core training, just the whole overall training, the laughter and the sharing,” Seaburg said. “We just kept up with it. We all

CHERIE VACHON, UPPER left, is all smiles as she lifts a kettlebell at the twice-weekly workouts held at the Comfort Hill Kennels in Vergennes. In between lifting kettlebells, Mary Gordon, above left, Vachon, Carol Spencer and Katrina Matthews do stretching exercises against the wall. Vachon said she not only keeps fit lifting the weights, but it has helped her recover quicker from a dislocated shoulder.

Independent photos/Steve James

support each other. We laugh. We have a good 50-minute exercise.”

Quigley agreed.

“Somehow we have arrived at a very cohesive group. Everybody gets along. Everybody supports each other in the classes and privately, when someone is having a family issue or a health issue or

whatever it might be,” Quigley said. “For me it’s an incredible group of people ... We have a lot of laughs.”

So, why kettlebells? Certainly it helped that the Palmers offered that alternative, and those who tried it liked it.

“I am an exercise person. I had done Curves, which you can’t even mention to

a kettlebell person. But that’s all there was here. But then this came, and I just loved it,” Seaburg said. “Joel still has videos on YouTube. You can watch them and see what an overall program this is.”

Quigley confessed she was an exercise skeptic before starting the Palmers’
(See Variety, Page 18)



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Sensory loss

(Continued from Page 15)

with family during the pandemic,” said Tim LaBeau, owner of the Burlington Home Instead. “In fact, according to a recent study, one in four — 28% — feel more comfortable using new technology than they did one year ago. But that technology may not work for seniors with failing eyesight or hearing. For them, isolation remains a threat.”

All of us can play a role in ensuring the aging population feels supported and connected during these times. LaBeau offers these tips to help connect:

- Contact older loved ones or neighbors regularly and create meaningful interactions to ensure they feel valued.
- During phone calls, be sure to speak up and enunciate your words clearly.
- When possible, visit in-person from a socially safe distance..

One simple way to make those with sensory loss feel included is to practice empathy. By putting ourselves in their shoes, we can help create a more inclusive and aging-friendly world for our loved ones, neighbors and others in the community.

“We can find opportunities to lead with empathy in everyday situations,” explains Hogan. “For example, if you’re in line at the grocery store and an older adult in front of you is having a hard time grabbing their credit card from their wallet, instead of getting frustrated, take a deep breath and remember that they may not have the same sensitivity in their fingers as you do.”

Brain’s immune cells and Alzheimer’s

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. — University of Virginia School of Medicine researchers last week shed light on a vital but previously unknown role for immune cells that protect the brain from disease and injury: The cells, known as microglia, also help regulate blood flow and maintain the brain’s critical blood vessels.

In addition to revealing a new aspect of human biology, the findings may prove important in cognitive decline, dementia and stroke, among other conditions linked to diseases of the brain’s small vessels, the researchers say.

“Precise blood vessel function is critical to accommodate the extreme energy demands of the brain for normal brain function,” said Ukpong B. Eyo, Ph.D., of the UVA Brain Institute. “These findings suggest previously unknown roles for these brain cells in the proper maintenance of blood delivery to the brain and provide novel opportunities to intervene in contexts where blood perfusion to the brain is impaired.”

THE ROLE OF MICROGLIA

Scientists have known that microglia play many important roles in the brain. For example, the cells police the natural blood-brain barrier that protects the organ from harmful germs in the bloodstream. Microglia also facilitate the formation of the brain’s complex network of blood vessels during development. And they are known to be important in many diseases. In Alzheimer’s disease, for example, recent work suggests that the loss of the immune cells is thought to increase harmful plaque buildup in the brain.

Scientists have been unsure, however, what role microglia play in maintaining blood vessels in a normal, healthy brain. The new research from Eyo and his colleagues reveals that the cells are critical support staff, tending the vessels and even regulating blood flow.

The UVA researchers identified microglia associating with the brain’s capillaries, determined what the immune cells do there and revealed what controls those interactions. Among

the cells’ important responsibilities is helping to regulate the diameter of the capillaries and possibly restricting or increasing blood flow as needed.

“Researchers have been studying these cells in the living brain for over two decades but this is the first time we are able to get an idea of these mechanisms of microglia-blood vessel interaction,” said Eyo, a top expert on microglia.

The researchers believe their new findings could have significant implications for diseases that affect the small vessels of the brain. These conditions are thought to contribute to strokes, Alzheimer’s, loss of balance and mental decline, among other serious health problems.

“We are currently expanding this research into an Alzheimer’s disease context in rodents to investigate whether the novel phenomenon is altered in mouse models of the disease and determine whether we could target the mechanisms we uncovered to improve known deficits in blood flow in such a mouse model of Alzheimer’s,” Eyo said. “Our hope is that these findings in the lab could translate into new therapies in the clinic that would improve outcomes for patients.”

The researchers have published their findings in the scientific journal *Nature Communications*.

“Researchers have been studying these cells in the living brain for over two decades but this is the first time we are able to get an idea of these mechanisms of microglia-blood vessel interaction.”

— Ukpong B. Eyo, Ph.D.

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Variety

(Continued from Page 16)

classes in December 2016. She said friend and fellow Warrior Denise Kennedy had to twist Quigley's arm to attend.

"Prior to that I hated exercise, and my neighbor dragged me kicking and screaming to try this," she said. "And I said I'm not going to like it. I can't do it. And I loved it."

Why?

"It's not just 30 minutes on a treadmill where you want to just fall asleep because you're so bored. It's constant movement. The little exercise routines last maybe three or four minutes, so it's always changing, it's always different," Quigley said.

BENEFITS

Research supports the Warriors' efforts as a great way to improve physical and mental health.

A Livestrong.com article ([tinyurl.com/kp8zfstn](https://www.livestrong.com/article/682427-kettlebells-weights/)) describes kettlebells as weights that "have been around since the 1700s" and are "shaped like a cannonball with an iron handle attached."

According to the article, "Working with weights such as kettlebells can slow down a number of conditions that tend to accompany aging ... strength training can decrease pain from arthritis and help you manage diabetes."

"Even if you're in perfect health, working with weights can improve your mood, help you sleep better and lower your risk of heart disease. Using kettlebells may also improve your bone density, so if you fall, your bones won't fracture as easily."

A paper from a quartet of medical professionals at Tufts University ([tinyurl.com/2nkj5pk8](https://www.tufts.edu/news/pressroom/2018/02/2018-02-20-essential-to-staying-strong-and-vital-during-older-adulthood-is-participation)) states:

"Essential to staying strong and vital during older adulthood is participation

in regular strengthening exercises, which help to prevent osteoporosis and frailty by stimulating the growth of muscle and bone. Feeling physically strong also promotes mental and emotional health.

“(It’s) the camaraderie and the core training, just the whole overall training, the laughter and the sharing. We just kept up with it. We all support each other. We laugh. We have a good 50-minute exercise.”

— Janet Seaburg

and mental

started with members leading routines written down on index cards, but by now they know they it all by heart.

As Seaburg said, the notes are no longer needed: "Kim and Joel had taught us more than we realized."

“This twice-a-week thing had been a way to get me out of the house ... We were together, and we were exercising. When everything came to a screeching halt (at the start of the pandemic), we all were lost. We didn't know what to do.”

— Karen Quigley

Quigley said Seaburg incorporated some of Kim Palmer's so-called "silver" playlist into her musical selections, including "a couple polka songs" to liven things up.

(See Quigley, Page 19)

Strength training exercises are easy to learn, and have been proven safe and effective through years of thorough research."

Quigley would agree. After five years of Warrior workouts how does she feel?

"Immensely better, much stronger. Probably stronger than I've ever been in my life," she said. "And it's a good mental exercise as well. It keeps your brain active."

WARRIORS ON THE MOVE

The Warrior workouts

started with members leading routines written down on index cards, but by now they know they it all by heart.

Of course, any workout benefits from music. Seaburg creates playlists of her preferred tunes and sends them to her grandson in Connecticut, and he takes care of the technological end.

"I have five good playlists, and I'm working on a couple more," Seaburg said, citing as favorites show tunes, the stylings of pop singers Michael Bublé and Roger Whittaker, and, if she wants to pick up the pace, songs by Willie Nelson or Huey Lewis and the News.



WARRIOR WORKOUTS STARTED with members leading routines written down on index cards, but by now they know the workouts by heart. Independent photo/Steve James

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Quigley

(Continued from Page 18)

While they laugh and sweat through their routines, Quigley said the Warriors also motivate one another.

"I watch these 80-somethings in our group who are doing jumping jacks better than I can," Quigley said. "I'm one of the youngest, and I'm 67. And we go upwards in age to a woman who's 86.

“I watch these 80-somethings in our group who are doing jumping jacks better than I can.”

— Karen Quigley

To be with these people, we're all seniors, but probably half the group is 10 to 15 years older than I am. They're inspiring. I want to be them when I'm that age."

What would she say to those who, like she did five years ago, resist the notion of exercising?

"I would say start by watching Joel Palmer's YouTube videos ([tinyurl.com/VintageFitness](https://www.tinyurl.com/VintageFitness)). They're fabulous. He has everything from a beginner's routine to advanced. He does incredible safety pointers," Quigley said.

But she admits not all will be fortunate enough to find a group like the Warriors.

"It really was a gift," Quigley said. "We're incredibly lucky to have Janet's beautiful yard in the summer and Comfort Hill in the winter."



The Warriors kettlebell exercise group includes 17 women. Shown from left at a Vergennes workout last week are, front row, Connie Houston, Cherie Vachon and Carol Spencer; and back row, Mary Gordon, Janet Seaburg, Joanne Ringer, Karen Quigley, Katrina Matthews.

Independent photo/Steve James

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How often should seniors visit their doctor?

Routine health checkups are a key part of staying healthy. Older adults may feel like they're always visiting one doctor or another. But what is an acceptable frequency for doctor appointments?

The answer isn't always so cut and dry, and many health professionals have mixed feelings even among themselves over the magic number. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends adults over the age of 65 visit the doctor more than twice as often as 18- to 44-year-olds. According to Paul Takahashi, a physician at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., adults should see their primary care physicians at least once a year to make sure diseases are being properly managed and to stay current on preventative screenings.

Visiting the doctor more frequently does not necessarily add up to better health, and it actually can do the opposite. Dr. Peter Abadir, an associate professor of medicine at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, says frequent visits to health facilities where sick people congregate puts one at a higher risk of illness or infection. Visiting the doctor only when necessary is one way to avoid risky exposure.

Doctor visit frequency is not a one-size-fits-all answer. A yearly physical

or checkup is a given, even for people who are healthy. People with a family history of certain conditions, like sleep disorders, cancer, high blood pressure and other conditions, may need to see a doctor more frequently than those with no such histories. In addition, patients may need referrals to certain specialists who work together to provide an overall health plan. That can increase the number of appointments and shorten the intervals between them. Johnson Memorial Health offers some statistics.

Visiting the doctor more frequently does not necessarily add up to better health, and it actually can do the opposite.

- People visit the doctor four times a year on average.
- Studies show that poor or uninsured people prolong the time between doctor's visits.

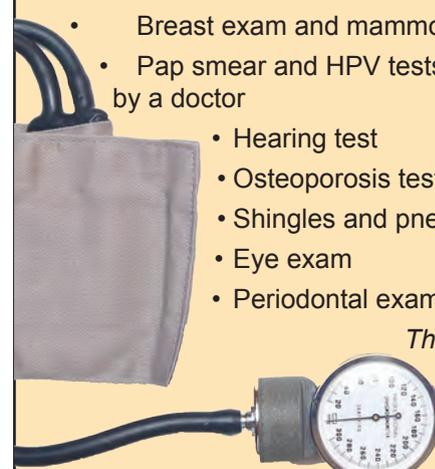
Individuals with high blood pressure may need to see the doctor four times a year to ensure medications are working properly.

Patients on dialysis see the doctor several times a week.

Dr. Jennifer Caudle, a family physician and assistant professor at Rowan University School of Osteopathic Medicine in Stratford, N.J., says too often people visit the doctor only when they are really sick. That works to their disadvantage because the appointment will focus only on treating the illness

Healthline and WebMD recommend older adults schedule these routine tests.

- Blood pressure check
- Blood test to check cholesterol and triglyceride levels
- Colorectal cancer exam starting at age 50
- Weight screening to check for gains or losses
- Prostate cancer screening for men age 70 and older
- Breast exam and mammogram for women, starting at age 40
- Pap smear and HPV tests at the recommended intervals advised by a doctor
- Hearing test
- Osteoporosis test
- Shingles and pneumococcal vaccines
- Eye exam
- Periodontal exam once per year



The frequency of the screenings may depend on individuals' health histories, so each test should be discussed with a physician during adults' annual checkups.

instead of addressing other preventative care and screenings. Balance is necessary in regard to health care.

Patients can work together with their doctors to develop screening schedules that are customized to their particular

profiles. These schedules can be modified as health history information changes or as patients age. Doctors can dial back or increase health visits as needed.

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Information on perimenopause and menopause

Women undergo two major biological stages in life, and each has profound effects on their bodies. The first is called menstruation and comes after the onset of puberty. At this point, young women are physically mature enough to have a child. Around 35 to 50 years later, that same woman's fertile years will cease and she will no longer be able to reproduce. This stage is known as menopause.

The approach of menopause can be a confusing time for women. Learning about menopause can help women make sense of the process.

Menopause is a natural occurrence in a woman's life. Menopause occurs 12 months after a woman's last period. It marks the end of the reproductive years and the cessation of menstruation.

Many women mistakenly believe that the years leading up to the end of their periods is menopause. In fact, this time of potential hot flashes and changes in their monthly cycles is a transitional period known as perimenopause.

The National Institute on Aging (NIA) says menopause can take place between ages 45 and 55. Perimenopause may

occur several years before that. **SIGNS THE TRANSITIONAL YEARS ARE BEGINNING**

Irregular menstruation is one of the first indications that a woman's body is changing. Periods may come at different times or be shorter or last longer. Some women bleed more or less than usual. Women should consult their gynecologists if their periods last more than a week or if bleeding is especially heavy.

HOT FLASHES COULD OCCUR

The NIA says many women experience hot flashes in both perimenopause and menopause. Hot flashes are believed to be related to changing estrogen levels.

The sudden feeling of heat in the upper part or all of the body is often accompanied by flushing of the face and neck. When they occur at night, hot flashes are called night sweats.

MOOD CHANGES/SLEEP ISSUES

Fluctuating hormones can cause other changes in the body. It's common for women in perimenopause to experience mood changes. However, mood also may be affected by disruptions to sleep that

can occur at this time. Women can speak to their doctors about remedies that can help with mood and sleep issues.

ADDITIONAL CHANGES

Since hormones are responsible for many operations in the female body, additional changes are possible at this point in a woman's life. Thinning hair and dry skin may occur. Many women also complain of vaginal dryness. Loss of breast fullness might be evident. Furthermore, weight gain and slowed metabolism are possible.

The Mayo Clinic says women may still experience pregnancy in midlife despite irregular periods. This can be a confusing time for women, as they may not be sure if they're pregnant or if they've started the menopause transition.

After a woman experiences menopause and enters post-menopause, she is more vulnerable to heart disease and osteoporosis. Women should continue to see their doctors for routine health visits and screenings.

Menopause is often accompanied by various side effects. Women can speak with their physicians if they have any questions or concerns during this unique time in their lives.

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- Medicare Counseling & Training
- Care & Service Coordination
- Transportation
- Volunteer Opportunities

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