



Above: The Fall Prevention program at Always Active includes 12-week classes that are currently held over Zoom twice a week. They are hosted in English, Spanish and Cantonese. Right: Staff at Gathering Thyme, a herb store, create flower essence with plants from their Petaluma garden.

Putting a focus on health to live longer, better lives

By Carey Sweet

Contemporary Americans can plan on living longer than they did a century ago — about 30 years longer, according to the 2021 Century Summit report by The Longevity Project and the Stanford Center on Longevity. That means a lifespan of about 47 years at the beginning of the 20th century has burgeoned to more than 78 years today, with people living to 100 becoming more and more common.

To reach that goal, older adults are increasingly taking charge of their health, both physical and mental, with the hope that they can enjoy longer and better lives. Some of the most important considerations are proper exercise, nutrition and medical care.

Taking care of ourselves doesn't have to be expensive,

either. City and state programs exist around the Bay Area that can keep us happy and healthy for little to no cost. Holistic medicine is another approach, offering affordable nutritional supplements and lifestyle approaches to enhance wellness.

ALWAYS ACTIVE

The first time Joan O'Connor fell down, she blamed it on San Francisco's famously ragged sidewalks. She had long suffered trouble with her knees, and when she tripped on a jutting concrete edge 18 months ago, she crashed and injured her head.

She tripped a second time this past February, hit her head again and was whisked by ambulance to the hospital for a CT scan. That was enough for her — at age 74, she already had endured two hip and two shoulder

» **“Chronic disease is on the rise, and many people are turning to holistic health care for answers to their complex problems.”**

Cheryl Fromholzer, Gathering Thyme founder

replacements — and she decided to seek help for the inevitable body and balance changes of aging.

A friend mentioned Dr. Christian Thompson, the founder and director of the Fall Prevention program at Always Active, a free service offered by San Francisco's On Lok 30th Street Senior Center. Funded by private donations, the San Francisco Department of Disability and Aging Services and On Lok, a nonprofit organization that helps older adults live independently, the service assists San Francisco residents aged 60-plus to improve physical health, mobility,



GATHERING THYME

And it's so liberating to just be in my living room, and not have to take Muni anywhere.”

O'Connor found the program so valuable, in fact, she has just wrapped up her second course series.

“I could have graduated to the maintenance group,” she said. “But Susan tells us to take our time, and I felt like the starter classes really met me where I am right now.”

There has been a mental benefit to the Zoom gatherings during COVID-19 as well.

“It's become a community that gives me joy during a difficult time,” O'Connor said, of her 15 classmates. “It helps with isolation. I really look forward to our time exercising together. Susan's way of being so supportive, respectful and compassionate is inspiring, and having the schedule structure has really



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Details

Fall Prevention: To enroll, contact Dr. Christian Thompson at 415-422-5270 or cjthompson@usfca.edu
Always Active: 415-550-2265, www.alwaysactive.org
Leah's Pantry: 650-351-7780, www.leahspantry.org
Gathering Thyme: 1332 Fourth St., San Rafael, 415-524-8693, www.gatheringthyme.com

helped me transition to getting older.”
Discovering tools to manage her well-being has brought O'Connor a new sense of personal power for her future, she noted.
“As we age, we must decide whether we are going to keep moving and pushing ourselves, or abandon our bodies,” she said. “But giving up would be a straight shot to a nursing home.”

LEAH'S PANTRY

Last fiscal year, Leah's Pantry served 335 clients seeking support with nutrition education and counseling on how to prepare easy, nutritious meals for their families and themselves.
Hosted in collaboration with the San Francisco Department of Disability and Aging Services, the free seminars are open to city residents enrolled in either a DAS-funded service or home-delivered meal program. Currently operating in a mix of virtual and in-person workshops, classes anchor around the core “Nutrition Education: Food Smarts” curriculum, where students learn about wellness diets, how to plan balanced, budget-friendly meals and participate in healthy cooking demonstrations.
“Diabetes and high cholesterol management are the most reported concerns,” Leah's Pantry Registered Dietitian Anna Ng said. “But we can address them with budget-friendly foods and recipes that nourish the body and also taste good. I find great joy in building relationships and helping others make



GATHERING THYME

Above: Gathering Thyme owner Cheryl Fromholzer is the team leader for San Geronimo Valley, an organic community garden in West Marin. Gathering Thyme's Petaluma ranch also features an organic herb garden. Below: An instructor with the Fall Prevention program at Always Active helps older adults increase flexibility, strengthen muscles and improve balance.

peace with food.”
Introductory workshops span 1.5 hours and are held once a week over a four-week period. The public also can access the Leah's Pantry/Healthy CalFresh Initiative www.EatFresh.org site, for free information on meal plans that help reduce food waste and costs, healthy recipes and information about how to purchase, store and prepare non-processed foods.
For more specific assistance, Leah's Pantry also offers one-on-one nutrition counseling with a registered dietitian, like Ng. That includes customized food planning advice for maintaining health or managing a medical condition, personalized support in setting and achieving nutritional goals and guidance for accessing free food resources.
Support is available in Spanish and Cantonese languages, as are ethnic meal plans recipes, such as chicken chile tacos and Chinese winter melon soup.

GATHERING THYME

When clients contact Gather-



ON LOK

ing Thyme founder Cheryl Fromholzer, they receive innovative prescriptions for their physical, mental and emotional balance. Plants. Herbs. Flowers. Shamanic healing, Reiki energy therapy and calming spiritual activities like animal communication.
That's because Fromholzer is a clinically trained Western Herbalist, and her San Rafael herb store and workshops show-

case holistic medicine. It's a form of healing that considers the whole person — body, mind, spirit and emotions — in the quest for optimal health and wellness. So instead of turning to chemical prescriptions, she curates an extensive herbal apothecary and custom blend formulas specifically for each client, while also counseling on natural dietary and lifestyle enhancement to improve

wellness.
While holistic medicine has long been a tenant of ancient cultures like Chinese and Native American communities, Fromholzer, 64, is seeing it more widely embraced by people of all ages and heritages.
“Chronic disease is on the rise, and many people are turning to holistic health care for answers to their complex problems,” she said. “Our difference is we seek to regain health, whereas America's current medical model relies on pharmaceutical drugs to suppress symptoms.”
Seeking holistic support doesn't mean that people, especially older adults, need to or should give up required prescriptions, however.
“Senior related issues we see quite a bit are anxiety and insomnia, mental health concerns like focus and concentration, changes in memory and mood, lack of vitality, prostate issues and menopausal concerns,” Fromholzer said. “We spend quite a bit of time with our clients to develop a plan of care that is focused solely on their needs, taking into consideration their constitution as well as any medication they may be taking.”
For people wanting to learn more about holistic medicine, the Thyme team hosts Zoom lectures or in-person classes twice a month at two field campuses. The Petaluma location features an organic herb garden planted with more than 60 different medicinal plants and an outdoor pavilion where instructors teach medicine making techniques. The Point Reyes Station location boasts an indoor/outdoor classroom on the historic Black Mountain Ranch.
There is a cost for workshops and classes, such as a \$275, two-day immersion in Petaluma April 9 and 10, 2022 about “Reading the Body.” But you can purchase many low-cost medicinal herbs at the San Rafael store, such as organic Ashwagandha root, a supplement revered by the Indian Ayurvedic system of medicine that is said to combat stress (\$2.95 for one ounce).

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