



NEWS RELEASE

Date: July 2, 2009

Date for release: July 6, 2009

How to Optimize Aging

West Lafayette, Ind.—There are ways to optimize the aging process, and Purdue University is launching three studies at a local retirement community to discover how to improve the quality of life for older adults.

“Gerontologists have long recognized the goal is not to add years to life but life to years,” said Ken Ferraro, Director of the Center on Aging and the Life Course at Purdue University. “These studies are specifically designed to add life to years—to optimize the aging experience.”

Purdue University has conducted dozens of studies with residents of retirement communities, but this is the first time that a set of intervention studies will occur within such a community. University Place opened in 2003 as a continuing-care retirement community in West Lafayette. It operates under the auspices of the Franciscan Sisters of Chicago Service Corporation.

Michael Logan, Executive Director of University Place, notes that although the community has a rich set of ties with the University, “this marks a new era in our collaboration with Purdue. We see the potential benefit of intervention studies to aid the well-being of older adults.”

Three studies are being launched this summer. Alex Francis, Associate Professor at Purdue, is leading a study on how to help older adults concentrate when confronting ambient noise. “Researchers have long referred to this as the ‘cocktail party problem,’ because surrounding noises distract us. For older adults, this can be especially challenging.”

Francis has designed a sequence of studies to improve cognition in noisy contexts. He hopes that the research will translate into effective strategies to help older adults to optimize intellectual functioning in noisy environments.

The other studies focus on optimizing heart health, especially for those facing cardiac risks, and how to optimize balance during standing and walking. The focus of those studies is how to prevent two adverse events—cardiac failure and falls.

Although residents of University Place have easy access to these studies, participation is open to seniors dwelling in their own homes or at other retirement communities.

According to Ferraro, the Center on Aging and the Life Course seeks breakthrough discoveries to improve the lives of older adults. “We know that adult age doesn’t convey much about a person’s functional status. John Glenn returned to space at 77. Thus, we seek ways to maximize functioning regardless of age, genetics, and environmental influences.”

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Related Web sites:

Purdue University Home Page: <http://www.purdue.edu/aging>