



JOYCE HANNA-SMITH

Age: 80

Occupation: Associate Director of the Health Improvement Program, Stanford School of Medicine —exercise physiologist, nutritionist and health educator

Education: BA, MA, MS

Family: husband- Gerald, two daughters and their husbands, two sons from my husband and their wives and a total of six grandchildren

Residence: Atherton, CA

Photo: Harvey Gold



Out for a jog to stay fit

What is HIP?

We're part of the Stanford Prevention Research Center in the School of Medicine. Our primary work involves Stanford University faculty and staff but our programs are shared and utilized around the world.

HIP aims to create a culture of wellness and increase employee productivity by empowering individuals to be self-managers of their health. We provide health education classes, health assessments and screening, coaching and group fitness classes. We also advocate policies that support environments conducive to healthy lifestyle behaviors.

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Biggest health challenges facing older women today?

There are many challenges but I think avoiding saropenia - loss of muscle mass—is a big one. It's important to conserve enough muscle function to last out your lifetime. I'd like to see every woman over 40 doing some kind of resistance training. We lose 15

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percent of muscle mass each decade between 50 and 70 and 30 percent a decade after 70. That loss transfers over into bone loss contributing to osteoporosis, reduced metabolism and reduced quality of life.

These changes compromise our ability to lead an independent, active life. Strength training can slow and possibly reverse saropenia.

What are the best things we can do to enjoy a longer, healthier life?

Find something to do that you love—that gives your life meaning. For me, it's directing an exercise program for cancer survivors “Living Strong Living Well.” More than 1,800 survivors come through our program. Participants get stronger and feel more in control of their health and life.

Everybody needs to exercise, eat healthfully, optimize resilience and manage stress, get adequate sleep, (more important than many people think!) stay mentally alert and, of course, avoid smoking. All these things are behaviors that we have control over. They're not genetic. Becoming more compassionate and forgiving are also important goals to pursue for a happier and healthier life.

How do you change a lifetime of bad habits?

We focus on changing behavior rather than merely giving out information. We emphasize taking tiny steps, one after the other. We encourage making small specific, realistic goals and focusing on making new habits rather than trying to stop old ones.



Biking is one of Joyce's favorite things

Is too much "sitting" killing us?

Yes, I actually give a talk on "Beware the Chair." We sit more than any previous generation. The first problem with sitting is that you're not using much energy to do it, which makes it harder to maintain a healthy weight.

However, there is even a more serious problem with sitting too much which is based on the "physiology of inactivity" principle referring to what happens to your body metabolically with prolonged sitting. Your muscles, unused for hours at a time, change in subtle fashion and as a result, you're

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Surprisingly, it's possible to be physically active yet highly sedentary – an "active couch potato!" Studies are showing that regular workouts, even though beneficial to your health,

do not counteract the bad effects of sitting. Exercise causes one set of (positive) changes in your body and being completely sedentary causes another set of (negative) changes. One does not undo the other. There are actually many things you can do

to avoid prolonged sitting. I have a standup/sit computer/desk at work and at home and here at HIP, we stand up during parts of meetings.

Anything coming from Stanford University to help improve the quality of life for older adults?

The Stanford Center on Longevity has a mission to redesign long life. The Center studies the nature and development of the human life span, looking for innovative ways to use science and technology to solve the problems of people over 50 in order to improve their well-being.

They deal with mind, mobility, financial security. Director Laura Carstensen, a psychologist, maintains that as people get older they usually become less stressed and more content!

How Do You Stay Fit and Active?

I started running in the 70s before the fitness boom started. I ran down

to the corner of my block and back. Then I ran down to two corners. Not too many people were running at that time, certainly not many women, and when people saw me they asked me what I was doing!

In 1978, I ran my first marathon. I ran San Francisco, Ave. of the Giants, Oakland, (twice) Napa, New York, (twice), Boston, Pikes Peak and Athens. Did a few mid-distance triathlons, too.

I ended up ranked 26th in the nation for my age group for the marathon. I have also climbed to the base camp in Mt. Everest, Kilimanjaro and Mt. Shasta.

A few years ago, I stopped running. I had run for more than 40 years and it was time to stop. Right now I keep fit doing high intensity intervals on the elliptical machine. It's certainly not like running outside in the sunshine and I miss that but I am able to exercise hard on a non-impact machine. I do a pretty hard strength training class

three times a week, bike and hike with friends and play golf with my husband. I used to play tennis but I had to give up something to get everything in and tennis was it.

"Why do you keep working at age 80?"

Directing an exercise program for cancer survivors and consulting with people to move to a healthy lifestyle help me feel that I'm making a little difference in people's lives.

In other to teach classes, I have to keep up with new research in behavior change, exercise physiology and nutrition. I like that motivation.

Also, I love working at Stanford, my alma mater, only 10 minutes from my home and the people I work with.

Retire? I don't know when but think I'll know when it's time.

FREE CANCER SURVIVORS PROGRAM

Joyce founded and directs with her colleague a 12-week small group program, Living Strong Living Well, designed for adult cancer survivors who have recently become de-conditioned or fatigued from their treatment and/or disease.

A Stanford program, it's offered at no cost to participants in the community in 13 Y's from San Jose to San Francisco. Certified Y fitness instructors trained by Stanford give personal instruction to the participants.

Over 1,800 participants have come through the program. Data shows a significant difference in fatigue, fitness, vitality and stress over the 12 week program. To learn more, visit LSLW.stanford.edu.

