



Lessons With a Healthy Turnout

"After 45 years of abusing my body with too much to eat, too much to drink, too much tobacco and not enough exercise, it was catching up with me," said Robert Hayes of Safford.

He signed up for a series of 10 preventive health-care classes that his physician, Dr. Tom Griffin, helped teach last year. Now, Hayes has quit his alcohol and tobacco habits, eats better and walks several miles with his wife Priscilla almost every day.

"I feel better," Hayes said recently. "I feel healthier. I am healthier."

The Hayeses took the health classes together. Priscilla Hayes said that, from doing the things suggested in the course and in other talks with Griffin, "We have a more open, more loving family. . . . We're really getting to know each other again and we're doing more things together."

The health classes were started by Margie Valentine, home economist for the Graham County Cooperative Extension Service. The free lessons emphasized proper exercise, nutrition, relaxation and self-counseling for keeping healthy. More than 200 Safford-area residents attended the classes last autumn.

"We had aimed for 35 to 50 participants," said Valentine. "But at the first session, 230 people showed up." She and others who organized

Photograph: Extension Home Economist
Margie Valentine and Dr. Tom Griffin.

the course decided to offer each week's class twice in order to have smaller groups. About half of the original turnout completed the 10-week course.

The Hayeses' benefits from the classes may have been greater than average because of their other contacts with Griffin, but an evaluation of the course showed that positive results were common. Out of 43 participants who voluntarily completed before-and-after-questionnaires, 12 fewer felt depression at the end of the course than at its beginning. Eleven fewer were bothered by headaches or muscular tension. Thirteen fewer had trouble getting a good night's sleep. Fourteen fewer felt fatigued more often than they thought they should. Six fewer were ignoring a treatable medical problem they knew they had, such as high blood pressure. Four fewer had thoughts of suicide. Also, 26 of these 43 were getting as much exercise as they thought they should by the end of the course, compared with just 15 of them at the start.

Course Repeated

Because of its popularity and success, the course was repeated once in the spring and again in the summer. Enrollment was limited to 35, and classes were moved from the Extension Service auditorium to Griffin's fitness center, but they were still free. The course will be offered again this autumn, if demand warrants it, said Valentine.

Before starting plans for this course, Valentine had been including some health information in her public lessons about nutrition, exercise and other topics.

"I saw that people were hungry for more information about how to keep themselves healthy, and I always feel that when people are hungry, feed them," she said. So last summer she decided to check with other local organizations offering health care or information to see what type of health education was needed most. She designed a survey asking about the health problems and needs of the community, then personally interviewed the staffs or representatives of 17 agencies.

"By the time I got through the list, I had heard the same things over and over, maybe with different terminology, but basically the same problems," Valentine recalled recently. Those problems included a need for training in preventive health care to avoid unnecessary medical costs, and the problem of coping with stress in everyday living.

She said, "The biggest headache in doing the interviews was that people kept saying, 'Somebody's always doing surveys like this, then usually that's the last we hear of it. What are you going to do about what you find out?' I promised them they'd see some action within a month."

Valentine quickly recruited help to design a course fitting the health needs identified in the survey. She worked with Dr. Griffin; Nancy Neavitt, an occupational therapist for Graham Behavioral Health Services; and Goeff Bury, adult education specialist for Eastern Arizona College. Griffin had been writing a book about how to keep healthy.

"Fitness Connection"

They titled the course, "The Fitness Connection: a Plan for Total Wellness." The autumn 1980 series was co-sponsored by the UA Cooperative Extension Service of Graham County, Graham Behavioral Health Services and Eastern Arizona College. EAC offered college credit in personal health for successful completion of the course. Three coun-

selors from Graham Behavioral Health Service helped Griffin and Valentine teach the course. Other speakers last fall included public health nutritionist Rochelle Ryder and outdoorsman Bob Hirsch.

Griffin's lessons for the course advocate a four-part plan for keeping healthy: regular exercise that is vigorous enough to stimulate the heart and lungs, a balanced diet that avoids unhealthful foods, periods of relaxation to relieve stress, and cultivation of a sense of self-worth. The classes teach how to follow each of these steps and why each is important. Griffin describes the results as feeling totally well, meaning energetic and enthusiastic, not just free from illness.

A half hour of aerobic exercise five to seven days a week helps improve the supply of oxygen to cells in the body by building up the efficiency of the heart, lungs and blood vessels. It also aids dramatically in weight control. Aerobic exercise is exercise that uses muscles in a repetitive way that allows them to be continuously replenished with oxygen, such as jogging or brisk walking. It differs from more strenuous exercise, like sprinting, that uses up oxygen more quickly than fresh oxygen can reach the muscles, thus leading to exhaustion. Swimming, dancing, bicycling and most sports can be part of a good aerobic exercise program. People who are not getting enough exercise should consult a physician before beginning.



Robert and Priscilla Hayes take a daily stroll through Safford.

Rest and Eat Well

Good health does not require avoiding stressful situations, just having the capacity to cope with them. Daily periods of relaxation help the mind and body counteract the harmful effects of stress. The "Fitness Connection" course materials describe several techniques for effective relaxation. All involve being in a comfortable, quiet setting and having a way to shift thoughts away from cares and woes. Concentration on breathing, or on a phrase repeated over and over, is among the methods Griffin suggests for clearing the mind of worries. He recommends a half-hour of such relaxation daily, either all at once or in spells of five minutes or more.

It is no secret that regular exercise and the ability to relax are healthy. The nutritional recommendations in the course also include few surprises: eat servings from each of the four basic food groups every day (grains, fruits and vegetables, dairy products, and high protein sources). Eat breakfasts. Drink plenty of water. Skimp on sugar, salt, and cholesterol sources.

However, even knowing all these things that contribute to health, many people have trouble finding the will power and time to do them. The "Fitness Connection" lessons attack this problem in two ways. They explain some of the basic biochemistry of health to convince people in the class that they *can* make themselves feel better. Griffin especially emphasizes the new-found importance of brain hormones that affect feelings of well-being. Second, the lessons teach people that they *should* spend the necessary time to protect their own health without feeling they are being wrongly selfish. One lesson even includes tips for managing time to fit health-maintenance into a daily schedule.

At the final session of the course this spring, a woman with several children asked Griffin how she could take time from her children during the day to relax for 30 minutes.

"One of the most unselfish things you can do for your children is to take care of yourself in front of them," he responded. "That teaches them the habit of taking care of themselves, too."

"We're Worth It"

Another woman in the class, Diana Larson, then gave an example illustrating Griffin's point. Prompted by discussions in earlier sessions of the course, she had begun fastening her seatbelt when she drove. Her eight-year-old son noticed the new habit and asked the reason for it. She explained to him that she thought she was worth protecting. Larson told the class that her son then buckled up too, and that he later commented, "Mom and I use our seatbelts because we're worth it."

Participants in the "Fitness Connection" courses have represented a cross-section of the Safford-area community of 20,000 people. In the initial series of classes last fall, they ranged in age from 18 to 65. More than half were married couples.

Andrew and Inez Burrell, both in their 60s, took the course together.

"We're both more aware now of how to take care of our own bodies through proper foods and exercise, rather than waiting to be sick and then paying the doctor to cure us," said Mrs. Burrell six months after completing the course. They exercise regularly on a mini-trampoline and by walking and bike-riding. They have cut down on salt and sugar in their diets, and she has tried some soybean recipes she learned

in the class. They have read books from the course's recommended reading list.

The Burrells learned about the course through the newspaper and from friends planning to enroll. Since they took it, they have recommended the course to several other friends.

Some of the other participants learned about the health classes during exercise or cooking classes they were taking from Valentine.

Robert and Priscilla Hayes took the course at the suggestion of Griffin, their family doctor.

Mr. Hayes said, "The large turnout made it easier to accept some of the advice he was giving us. It's easier when you see that a lot of other people are fighting the same problems—that you're not alone."

Enjoyable Exercise

Now, they are more careful what they eat, and include a salad night in their diet at least once a week. They go for a brisk, three-to-five-mile walk together most evenings after supper. "At first, I looked at the walking as a chore I had to do," he said. "But now, I look forward to it almost every day. . . . I walk almost everywhere I go in town."

She added, "Walking everywhere, you also get to see your community and know it better. I like that."

Giving up some unhealthy habits, including overdrinking, has helped Mr. Hayes feel better about himself. It has also led to more open relationships with his wife and two teenage sons. Mrs. Hayes' improved self-image has helped her feel good about returning to artwork she had given up years ago. She noted, "When you don't like yourself, you don't like the things you do." Now, she likes her paintings and takes art classes at Eastern Arizona College.

The health lessons have helped them learn how to handle some situations that don't go smoothly, too. Mrs. Hayes said, "When I get, as the kids call it, 'uptight,' I know it's time to put on my shoes and go for a walk. When I come back, I really feel better."

Other people have noticed the changes in the Hayeses' lives. "People say, 'Hey, you really must be doing something good. How can we get started on it, too?'" said Mrs. Hayes. She tells them to go to the "Fitness Connection" classes.