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**Senior Safety News**

**An Apology**

First we want to apologize. We were not able to issue our June 09 Newsletter. While it is only the second interruption in over a year, we strive to keep our readers with a constant flow of ideas and trends in the retirement community.

**This Issue's Features:**

1. Insomnia and Falls
2. Tips on dealing with summer heat, what to avoid and the symptoms
3. The role of video games in promoting cognition in the elderly
4. Baby boomers, social networks and what boomers require of them.

**Posters**

We have increased the number of posters on the website. Go to [www.seniorsafetyonline.com](http://www.seniorsafetyonline.com) Posters are in the Home and Housing sections.



**Can insomnia lead to falls in the elderly?**

**Phyllis C. Zee, MD, PhD**

*Professor of Neurology, Feinberg School of Medicine, Northwestern University, Chicago, Illinois; Director, Sleep Disorders Center, Northwestern Memorial Hospital, Chicago, Illinois*

Falls are common among older persons living in the community, particularly in elderly residents of nursing homes, resulting in disability and death. Similarly, insomnia is also very common in older adults, and sedative-hypnotic medications are often used to treat insomnia in this population. Several previous studies have shown an association between sedative-hypnotic use and falls in the elderly.[1] In a study published in 1988, sedative use was found to be the greatest predisposing factor for falls.[1] Therefore, many physicians have concerns regarding the use of sleeping pills in older adults with insomnia.

Other studies indicate that nighttime sleep problems are a significant risk factor for falls in the elderly.[2] More recently, results from a large study suggested that the underlying insomnia, rather than the medications used to treat it, increased the risk for falls in elderly nursing home residents.[3]

The investigators found that untreated or partially treated residents with insomnia had a higher risk for falls than those who take sleep medications to improve their sleep. In older people, there are multiple mental and physical factors that, when combined with insomnia, can lead to falls.

What is clear is that sleep problems are associated with falls, but the debate regarding the added contribution of hypnotic medications to falls in older individuals is ongoing (see the meta-analysis by Glass and colleagues[4]). Medications are one approach to the treatment of insomnia. Behavioral approaches, including relaxation and the promotion of good sleep habits, such as regular exercise, exposure to light during the day, an environment that is conducive to sleep, and avoidance of caffeine and alcohol, are also important effective treatments for insomnia.

source.....*Medscape CME*

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## Extreme Heat Causes Major Health Problems For Older Adults

As we prepare for hotter, humid weeks ahead and temperatures reach well over 100 degrees in some parts of the country, older adults are at higher risk of health problems if they don't take the proper precautions to protect themselves from the sweltering heat. About 200 Americans die of health problems caused by high heat and humidity every year, most of them are 50 or older. Due to some of the physical changes that happen as we age, older adults can't cool down as easily as others.

**The AGS' Foundation for Health and Aging (FHA) suggests these steps for seniors to help stay safe in the summer months:**

- Use air conditioning in the home or go where it's air-conditioned -- a shopping mall, grocery store, senior center, movie theatre, museum or library, for example. (Fans are not effective enough to adequately cool down the body during intense heat waves.)
- Drink a lot of water and other clear beverages that don't contain alcohol or caffeine. A good way to measure if enough fluids are being ingested is to check urine color. If urine is a light yellow color, enough water is being taken into the body. If it's darker yellow, the body needs more water.
- Take cool showers, baths, or sponge baths.
- Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing and hats.



### Avoid:

- Extended periods of sun exposure.
- Walking long distances, lifting heavy objects, or other strenuous activities.

### Below are the most common health problems caused by heat:

- Dehydration: Weakness, headache, muscle cramps, dizziness, confusion and passing out.
- Heat stroke: A body temperature of or above 103 degrees; red, hot and dry skin; a fast pulse; headache, dizziness, nausea or vomiting, confusion and passing out.
- Heat exhaustion: Heavy sweating or no sweating, muscle cramps, tiredness, weakness, paleness, cold or clammy skin, dizziness, headache, nausea or vomiting and fainting.

Source .....American Geriatrics Society



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## Can Video Games Boost Thinking Skills In Elderly?

Researchers at North Carolina State University and the Georgia Institute of Technology have received a \$1.2 million grant from the National Science Foundation to study whether and how video games can boost memory and thinking skills in the elderly - and then to use their findings to develop a prototype video game to do just that.

The researchers will use the grant money, which is part of the federal stimulus package, to fund a two-phase research initiative. In phase one, researchers will ascertain whether certain qualities that can be found in video games result in improved cognitive functioning in older adults. Cognitive functioning refers to memory, problem-solving, critical thinking and other mental skills.

Dr. Anne McLaughlin, assistant professor of psychology at NC State and the principal investigator (PI) for the grant, explains that the first phase asks: “What qualities does a game need to contain to improve cognition? We want to determine the components an effective game should have.”

In phase two, once the researchers have determined which qualities result in the most significant improvements, they will develop a set of guidelines that can be used to design a new class of video game for older adults, as well as a prototype video game that follows those guidelines. The NSF grant spans four years, from September 2009 to August 2013.

McLaughlin says previous research suggests there are three qualities in video games that may foster improved cognitive functioning: attentional demand, novelty and social interaction. Attentional demand is the degree to which an individual has to focus attention on a task in order to complete it successfully. Novelty, or exposure to a task one has not encountered before, “may also be relevant,” McLaughlin says, “because existing research shows that novelty is a catalyst for learning.” Social interaction should also encourage players to devote more attention and effort to the game.

The researchers will test the cognitive functioning of participants, men and women 65 years old and older, to establish a baseline. They will then have participants play BOOM BLOX™ or BOOM BLOX™ Bash Party, Wii™ video games developed by Electronic Arts, before testing the participants’ cognitive functioning again. BOOM BLOX and BOOM BLOX Bash Party are games in which novelty, attentional demand and social interaction may be manipulated by the researchers.

“For example, if we find that novelty and attentional demand improve cognition, we’ll then develop a game that focuses on that,” McLaughlin says. Dr. Jason Allaire, an assistant professor of psychology at NC State who is co-PI on the grant, explains that developing a new game highlighting the qualities that seemed to have the greatest impact on cognitive functioning “will allow us to see if we can get greater benefits that might transfer to real-world outcomes such as remembering to take medication.”

McLaughlin and Allaire will be working with Georgia Tech Research Scientist Maribeth Gandy to develop the prototype game based on their research findings.

*Source: .....North Carolina State University*



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## **Baby-boomers Need Social Network Sites Based On Their Own Needs**

Social network sites should be designed to meet the needs of 55-65-year-old people. Researchers at Helsinki Institute for Information Technology HIIT found out that many baby-boomers think social network sites like Facebook are unfit to them. This is the reason why so few of them use any social network services on the net.

According to a study to be published in HCI2009 conference 55-65 year-old Finns consider social network sites unsecure. In addition, they consider the behaviour at these sites often inappropriate. According to researchers Vilma Lehtinen, Jaana Näsänen and Risto Sarvas young people, for instance, usually find it natural to publish a personal pictures on the web, but many Finnish baby-boomers consider that inappropriate as self-assertion.



The difference is explained by the fact that baby-boomers are used to being in touch with their friends in ways established in the past decades. The boomers' manners and assumptions about social interaction have been formed in a world without intensive digital interaction. On the contrary, younger people's relationships have been built up in an environment where digital interaction is an integral part of maintaining human relations. Rules on what is considered appropriate have been formed to fit each world respectively. Most popular social network sites are built to fit the behaviour rules of the younger people's world. This is the reason why the baby-boomers' world of friendships does not fit easily to this environment and older generations do not find the sites appealing or intuitive.

Researchers say there is a need, for example, to create services not emphasising the search of public attention and openness to the whole world: baby-boomers' values and habits make the boomers consider personal privacy management and protection very important. People should also be able to learn to use the web services in groups and with their old friends so that the long-term friendships could be transformed naturally to the web.

It is important to open social networking technology for older generations. Changes in life retirement, deterioration of health, family members moving away may make place and distance independent online human relations very beneficial.

Network society is one of the research areas of Helsinki Institute for Information Technology HIIT. HIIT is a joint research institute of Helsinki University of Technology TKK and the University of Helsinki for basic and strategic research on information technology.

*Source: ..... Teknillinen korkeakoulu*