

Stay Steady, Stay Connected:

How Social Connection Supports
Mobility as We Age



About WIHA

- **Mission:** To improve the health and well-being of all people as we age by disseminating evidence-based programs and practices and by engaging in collaborative public health strategies in Wisconsin and beyond.
- <https://wihealthyaging.org>
- **Age Well Newsletter**



Introduction to Speaker

Debby Berenz

*Director of Adult Outpatient
Rehabilitation Program Innovation*

Curative Therapy Services



Stay Steady, Stay Connected:

How Social Connection Supports Mobility as We Age



Therapy Services

Dedicated to Helping People Thrive

www.curative.org

About the Speaker



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Curative Therapy Services

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Curative.org

GETTING OLDER
ISN'T ALL THAT
BAD, NELSON.



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THERE ARE GOOD
THINGS THAT COME
WITH OLD AGE...



MORE FREE TIME,
SENIOR DISCOUNTS,
LOTS OF GOOD STORIES
TO TELL...



BRIAN
CRANE

gettyimages.com

BUT THE VERY
BEST ONE IS
SITTING RIGHT
HERE NEXT TO ME.



WHO,
ME?

© Meta AI

Fall Prevention

Vision



Balance

Home Safety

Social Connection

Sleep

Hearing

Footwear

Medication Management

Strength

Learn More Here: fallsfreewi.org

CDC's STEADI Fall Risk Screen

(Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths and Injuries)

1. Have you fallen in the past year?
2. Do you feel unsteady when standing or walking?
3. Do you worry about falling?



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Manage just ONE fall risk factor

(vision, balance, hearing, social connection, etc.)



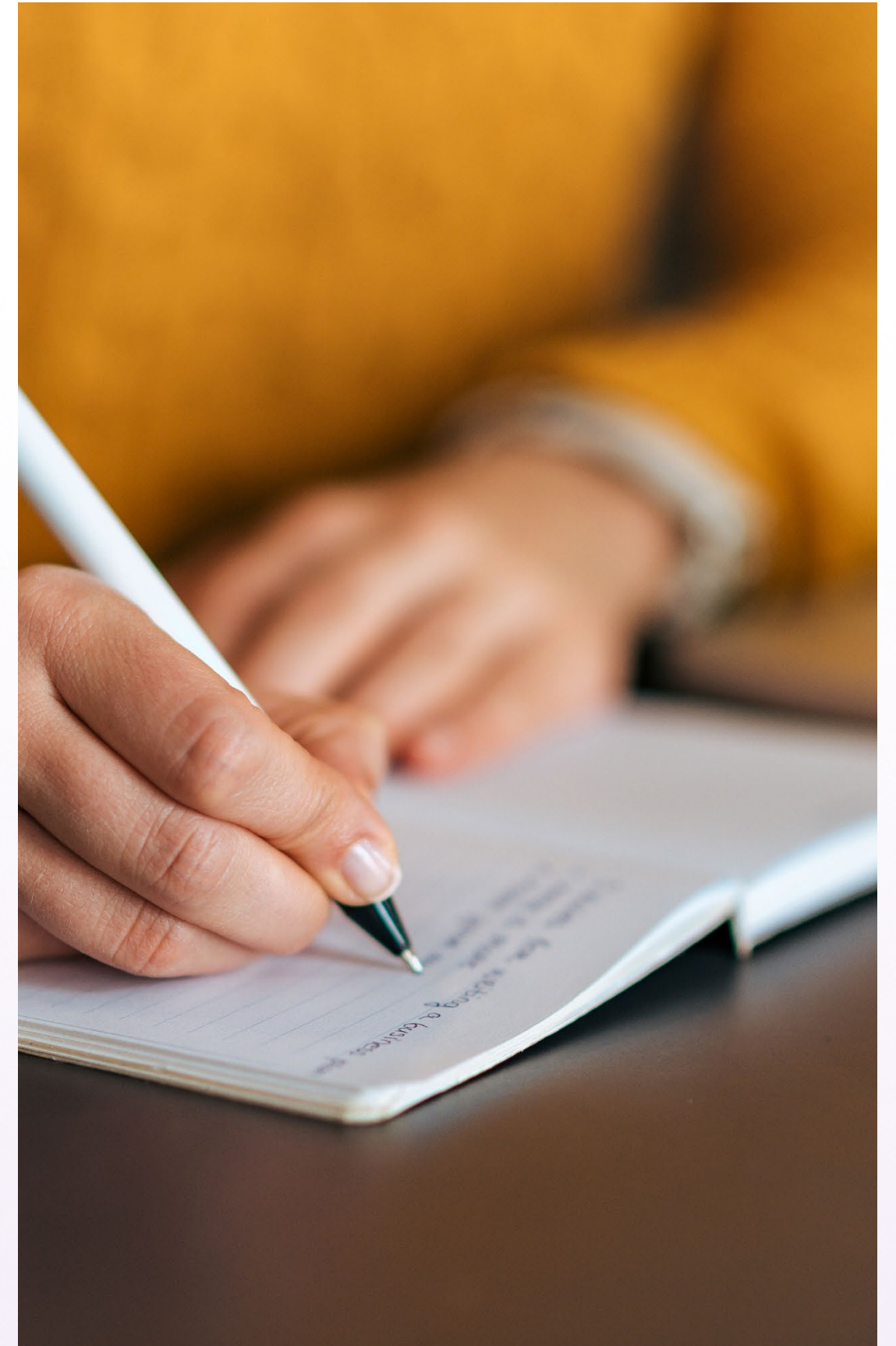
Reduce overall fall risk by 20-30%



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Research

- 300,000 people, 148 health studies
- 2010 study by Dr. Julianne Holt-Lunstad
- “Meta-Analysis on Social Relationships and Mortality Risk”
- Brigham Young University
- Published in PLOS Medicine



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Topic Outline

- Social Connection
- Isolation & Loneliness – How do they differ?
- Social Isolation & Loneliness Risks
- Social Connection Benefits
- Social Connection & Staying Steady connection
- Social Connection Challenges
- Overcoming Barriers
- Resources
- Q & A



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QUIZ!

TRUE connection is most accurately measured by:

- A. The total number of friends you have on social media or in an address book.
- B. How many social events you manage to attend in a single week.
- C. Your internal, subjective sense of belonging and involvement in your community.**
- D. Living in a crowded city rather than a quiet town.



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ANSWER: C

Your internal, subjective sense of belonging and involvement in your community.

WHO (World Health Organization)

Social connection = How people relate...

structure, function, QUALITY of our interactions



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Social Isolation vs. Loneliness

Isolation =

- Social disconnection
 - Lack of social relationships, community involvement, routine interactions
 - Measurable/objective
-



Loneliness =

- Emotional feeling of being alone or disconnected regardless of number of people around
- Difficult to measure/subjective



Risks of Isolation/Loneliness - Physical Health

- Lack of activities → Muscle weakness & poor balance
- 29% increased risk of heart disease
- 32% increased risk of stroke
- 30% increase of a premature death
- Systemic (system-wide) inflammation
- Chronic high blood pressure
- Weakened immune system & slower healing



Risks of Isolation/Loneliness - Cognitive Health

- 50% increased risk of dementia
- Quicker memory loss
- Cognitive decline
- Slower processing skills or ability to think clearly



Risks of Isolation/Loneliness - Mental & Emotional Health

- Significant increase in depression and clinical anxiety
- Higher vulnerability to chronic stress and emotional instability
- Greater risk of suicidal ideation and self-harm
- Increased fear of falling – which increases the actual risk of falling



Risks of Isolation/Loneliness— Lifestyle & Behavior

- Poor sleep quality, insomnia, and chronic fatigue
- Higher rates of physical inactivity and poor dietary choices
- Less likely to notice or address home safety hazards
- Delay in emergency help if a fall occurs while you're alone



QUIZ!

Researchers have discovered that chronic loneliness and isolation carry the same physical risk to your lifespan as which well-known health hazard?:

- A. Smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day
- B. Drinking one cup of sugary soda per day
- C. Skipping your morning stretch or walk
- D. Forgetting to take a daily multivitamin



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ANSWER: A Smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day!!



Loneliness isn't just an emotional feeling!

- changes our body chemistry
- elevates stress hormones
- affects our physical health

(just as deeply as major habits like smoking)



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Why Social Connection Matters

“When we have strong social connections, it changes how we show up in the world. It makes us more resilient to stress, improves our performance at work, and enhances our physical health. It is a biological necessity, not just a nice-to-have.” – Dr. Vivek Murthy



Learn More Here: FallsFreeWI.org

The Benefits of Social Connection

Physical

Longer Life
Healthy Hearts
Immune Support
Less Body Stress
Stronger Bodies

Cognitive

Sharper Thinking
Know Your Space
Better Memory
Brain Exercise

Mental/ Emotional

Higher Self - Esteem
Stress Reduction
Decreased Anxiety
& Depression
Better Moods

Lifestyle/ Behavior

Healthy Routines
Joining Classes
Sticking to Goals
Safety Net

Learn More Here: connectwi.org

Social Connection & Staying Steady: Practical Example



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Social Connection

Muscles Strengthened

Body Adjustments

Walking Surfaces

Physical & Mental Challenge

Endurance & Muscle Strength



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Social Connection

Visual & Spatial Feedback

Sensory Input

Mood Boost

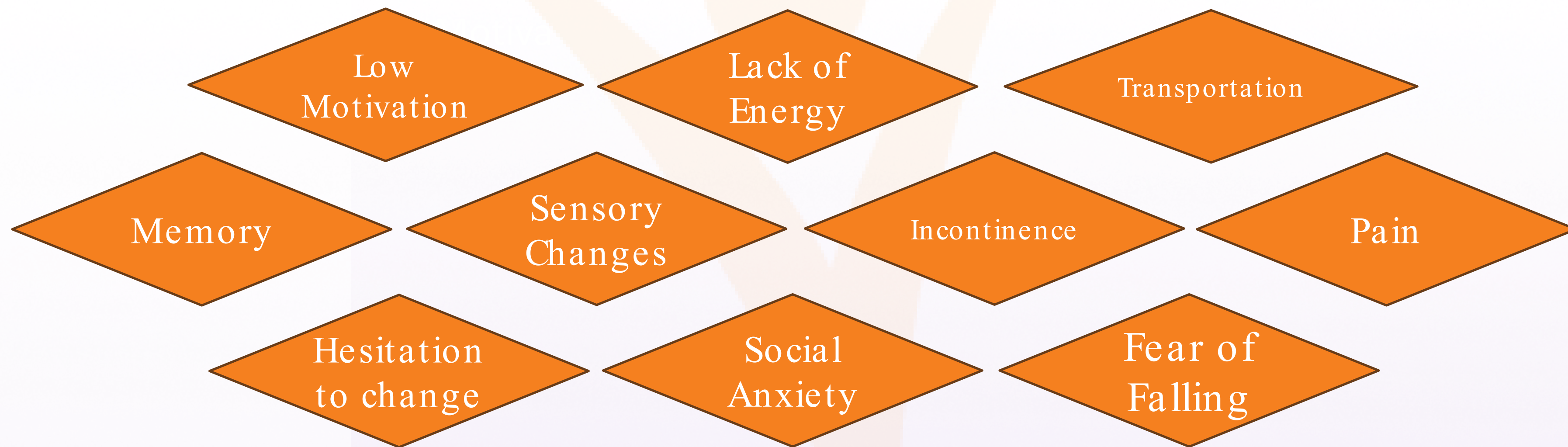
Purpose & Belonging

Support



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Social Connection - Challenges



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QUIZ!

Which of the following is TRUE about having a fear of falling?

- A. It only happens to people who have already had a serious fall and injury in the past.
- B. It is a very common feeling that can affect older adults even if they have never fallen before.
- C. It is a permanent condition that cannot be changed with exercise or lifestyle adjustments.
- D. It completely disappears as soon as a person starts using a cane or a rolling walker



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ANSWER: B

It is a very common feeling that can affect older adults even if they've never fallen before.

- While a fear of falling is common after a fall, you don't have to have fallen before to have a fear of falling.
- Using a device may not change your fear if your root issue isn't addressed. BUT, that fear can be changed and your confidence increased with lifestyle adjustments.



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Fear of Falling

Common Myth: Being fearful of falling is a helpful way to keep your body safe & steady when you're moving around.

- Being **cautious** and **aware** is GOOD!
- BUT when we are afraid of falling, we...
stiffen up + **hesitant steps** = risk of tripping

MYTHS
BUSTED



Think about how your body physically reacts when you are very nervous versus when you feel relaxed and confident.

Fear of Falling: Vicious Cycle



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The Stigma of Falls

Judgement/stigma in our society
leading to older adults:

- Not admitting to a fear of falling
- Not reporting falls (nearly 50% of older adults who fall don't tell healthcare provider or family)



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Top Reasons Falls Not Reported

- Fear of losing independence
- Normalization of the fall (false stereotypes about age)
- Shame/embarrassment
- Desire to protect loved ones from worry
- Worry about increased costs
- Denial & false confidence
- Lack of consequence awareness



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Serious Consequences

- Missed opportunities for getting help
 - Increased social isolation
-
- Roughly 1 in 5 falls (20%) result in severe injury (broken bone or head injury)
 - 4.5 million emergency department visits each year
 - 1.4 million of those ED visits results in hospitalization
 - Falls are the #1 cause of injury-related deaths for those over 65 years old.



Learn More Here: fallsfreewi.org



Overcoming Barriers

01

Talk to
someone you
can trust.

02

Explore
community
resources.

03

Connect to a
therapy clinic or
physician.



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Benefits of Therapy (OT/PT/ST)

- Assessing fall risk factors & providing interventions
- Strengthen muscles, improve balance/ gait
- Reduce or eliminate incontinence
- Pain management
- Memory & problem solving
- Vision
- Dizziness
- Customizing exercise program for you
- Energy conservation (of our bodies)
- Educating on activity modifications
- MANY More...



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Resources

General &
Gov. Support

- ❖ ADRCs
- ❖ Eras Sr Network
- ❖ Senior Centers

Health & Fall
Prevention

- ❖ Stepping On
- ❖ Silver Sneakers
- ❖ WI Masters Games
- ❖ WIHA (WI Inst. for Healthy Aging)

Learning &
Social

- ❖ Lifelong Learning
- ❖ Senior Social Networks
- ❖ Volunteer

Home Care &
Check-Ins

- ❖ Senior Living
- ❖ Companion Care
- ❖ AARP Programs
- ❖ Well Connected



Learn More Here: wihealthyaging.org

Social Prescribing

Physicians or other healthcare professionals refer patients to non-clinical, community-based activities such as:

Museum passes

Theater tickets

Nature excursions

Activities are FREE

(Not covered by insurance but by grants and community partnerships)

Not all physicians participate.

If they do, they may look at:

- Mental & behavioral health
- Social determinants of health
- Chronic physical illnesses
- Practical life stressors

MD appointments may include:

- Screening
- Collaboration
- Prescribe

Call to Action...

Take 1 concrete step today!!



“Over many years of taking care of older patients, I've learned that the factors many people think are most important for aging well — such as having longevity in your family or lack of physical illnesses — do not guarantee a positive experience with getting older. It's the quality, duration and nature of your relationships that seem to matter most.”

~ Dr. Amit A. Shah, MD



Questions??

Debby Berenz
cts@curative.org
414-479-9270



Feedback

- Upon Zoom exit
- Share your thoughts



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wihealthyaging.org/find-a-workshop/

Healthy Living with Chronic Pain

Learn skills and strategies to better manage your chronic pain with this 6-week workshop.

[See Schedule](#)

Healthy Living with Diabetes

Learn skills and strategies to better manage your diabetes in this 6-week program.

[See Schedule](#)

Living Well with Chronic Conditions

Learn skills and strategies to better manage your health and help you to age well in this 6-week program.

[See Schedule](#)

Mind Over Matter: Healthy Bowels, Healthy Bladder

Improve or prevent bowel and bladder incontinence in this 3-session program. (For women only)

[See Schedule](#)

Physical Activity for Lifelong Success

A program designed for those who have not exercised in a while, this 10-week program will help you get started with being active!

[See Schedule](#)

Pisando Fuerte

Aprende como prevenir caídas con este programa de prevención de caídas multifactorial de 8 semanas.

[See Schedule](#)

Powerful Tools for Caregivers

Receive support and learn how to care for yourself as you provide care to another. To find a workshop, visit:
<https://www.powerfultoolsforcaregivers.org/class-type/wisconsin/>

[See Schedule](#)

Stand Up for Your Health

Sitting too much can be bad for your health. Learn how to sit less and stand more with this 4-week program.

[See Schedule](#)

Stepping On

Learn how to prevent falls with this 7-week multi-factorial fall prevention program.

[See Schedule](#)

Tomando Control de Su Salud

Learn skills and strategies to better manage your health and help you to age well in this 6-week program.

[See Schedule](#)

Vivir Saludable con Diabetes

Learn skills and strategies to better manage your diabetes in this 6-week program.

[See Schedule](#)

Walk with Ease

This 6-week walking program helps you to become more active, reduce pain from arthritis, and live better.

[See Schedule](#)



Fall Resilience & Social Connection

FallsFreeWI.org

ConnectWI.org



Next for Age Well Series

Age Well Series

The Power of Your Gut: How the Microbiome Shapes Healthy Aging

The foods we eat do more than provide energy—they also shape the health of our gut microbiome, the trillions of microorganisms that play an important role in digestion, immunity, and overall well-being. In this webinar, you'll learn how the gut microbiome interacts with the immune system and why these connections become increasingly important as we age. We'll explore the latest research on how diet influences gut health, what scientists are discovering about the relationship between the gut microbiome and healthy aging, and practical strategies that may help support lifelong health and reduce the risk of chronic disease.



Presenters:
Margaret Alexander, PhD
Assistant Professor, University
of Wisconsin - Madison

October 8
1:00-2:00pm

[Register Here](#)



Thank You, WIHA Sponsors!



Q&A

