

MEDIA RELEASE

ERIE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH



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Erie County Department of Health’s ‘Active ELDERS’ program bridges department’s accredited health promotion work and pandemic mitigation

Erie, PA – Senior citizens across Erie County are opting to stay home in greater numbers to decrease their likelihood of contracting COVID-19. This practical decision to physically separate for extended periods of time is creating other challenges for seniors such as increasing feelings of loneliness and reducing physical activity, which can lead to unintentional falls. To combat these challenges, the Erie County Department of Health – in partnership with UPMC and WQLN – is launching “Active ELDERS – At Home, but Not Forgotten.”

Hosted by Traci Teudhope, the one-hour program will be broadcast via our local PBS affiliate, WQLN PBS Channel 54.1 from Thursday, Jan. 7, to Sunday, Feb. 21. The “Active ELDERS” show features six physical activity videos demonstrating daily stretches and low impact movements in seated and standing positions. Also highlighted are mental wellness techniques that seniors can use to work through difficult feelings of loneliness, fear, anxiety and sadness.

“When the pandemic arrived in Erie County and we were compelled to cancel in-person instruction, we decided to meet seniors where they are – at home,” said Nicole Bolash, health promotion director at the Erie County Department of Health. “Reallocating resources from the Safe and Healthy Communities grant allows us to continue our falls prevention campaign while educating seniors during this second wave of isolation.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), falls are the leading cause of injury among adults ages 65 and older, and routine activity is critical to prevention.

“When practiced on a regular basis, the movements we show in the videos work to increase balance, flexibility and strength,” said Neurological Physical Therapist Dr. Mary Kingston of UPMC Centers for Rehab Services. “This builds a person’s resilience and decreases his or her chance of experiencing an unintentional fall.”

While falls can adversely affect a senior’s physical health, social isolation has an even greater negative impact on overall well-being. Social isolation significantly increases a person’s risk of premature death from all causes, a risk that rivals those of smoking, obesity and physical inactivity.

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This disruption in normal routines and rhythms can turn to benefit when seniors hear they are not alone in their experience. “Active ELDERS” encourages viewers to take an active role in jump-starting their physical, mental and social activity right where they live – at home.

“Mental wellness is a state of well-being that allows us to cope with stress, manage setbacks and increase our quality of life, and it requires action on our part – building mental wellness and muscle strength,” said Clinical Psychologist Dr. Lisa May of UPMC Western Behavioral Health at Safe Harbor.

For the “Active ELDERS” show airdates and times, visit <https://www.wqln.org/Watch/Active-Elders>.

To access the ACTIVE ELDERS physical activity videos and audio-recorded relaxation exercises, visit <https://bit.ly/ActiveElders>.

Beyond the show airdates, organizations and agencies serving the senior population are encouraged to air the videos on in-house monitors for their clients, residents, and/or patients. Tech-savvy family members are encouraged to help their elderly relatives and friends gain access to the videos online for use as a daily practice after clearing this activity with their PCP.

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