

# SENIOR LIVING



**WANT TO LIVE A HEALTHIER LIFE?** Tips from the government's 'food plate' inside.

# Aging Gracefully

**G**etting older doesn't mean you have to lose your style, grace or good looks. Aging gracefully is an art, and one that you can master with practice and healthy habits.

## STAY POSITIVE

You know the saying. You are as young as you feel.

Well, attitude plays a big role in determining exactly how we feel as we age. Smiling, laughing and maintaining a positive demeanor – even when times are tough – can help keep us young at heart.

Projecting happiness and excitement about life will help others around you, too. And speaking of others, surrounding yourself with an equally positive social circle can help keep your focus on the good things in your life.

Growing older is often accompanied by health issues, grief and challenges. It's how you decide to deal with these issues that will help or hurt your chances of aging gracefully.

## FIND A HOBBY

Getting involved in something you are passionate about can help you maintain your vigorous spirit and positive glow.

Join a garden club to show off your flowers, plants and shrubs. Make bingo night a weekly endeavor to get out of the house and make new friends through healthy competition. Spend more time



© FOTOLIA / AP

taking your grandchildren to the park.

Anything you enjoy doing can be transformed into a hobby that you can relish for years to come. Without meaningful activities to partake in, you might be left feeling bored or alone.

Options are endless for getting involved in something that will ultimately help you age gracefully.

## STAY INFORMED

For many women, the beauty shop holds the key for

vibrant, smooth skin and youthful hair-dos. A trip to the local hot spot allows women to discuss emerging beauty trends and skin-care products.

Women and men, alike, can also join their city gyms to find tips for maintaining

their bodies. If you are constantly seeking out information on how to age gracefully, then you have won half the battle.

Utilize the guidance you receive to choose the best ways for you to ensure a graceful aging process.

# The Car Key Decision

**I**t's one of the hardest decisions people will have to make as a senior citizens – handing over the car keys.

The transition signals the end of an independence you have enjoyed since your teenage years and can be a tough pill to swallow. But knowing that you are making the decision based on your safety and the safety of those around you can help you work through any emotional challenges attached to the choice.

But how do you know when it's time to trade in the keys for public transportation, walking or depending on rides from friends and family members?

## FATIGUE

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that fatigue contributes to at least 1,500 fatalities and 40,000 injuries annually.

Drowsy driving can be caused by lack of sleep or medications, and should be a deciding factor in whether or not you get behind the wheel.

Obviously, you should avoid driving anytime you are tired, but if your fatigue comes in waves, you might be better off not risking being behind in the driver's seat when your next tired spell comes on.

## HONESTY COUNTS

None of us like to admit



© FOTOLIA / AP

when we're not at our best. But when it comes to driving, an honest self-assessment is the first step in figuring out your driving abilities.

How is your reaction time in fast-paced situations? Has it slowed down in recent years?

A reduced reaction time

can lead to an increased risk for dangerous crashes. If you have noticed more hesitation in your decision-making skills, it may be time to consider riding over driving.

## TALK ABOUT IT

Once you have taken a look

at yourself and your driving skills, speak with family and friends about how you are feeling. They will support your decision either way, and you know that you can find an honest opinion from those closest around you.

There are also driving professionals who are available to

help. Driver assessment services are available in every state.

Contact your state department of motor vehicles to schedule a professional driving test. Don't be embarrassed. Feel proud that you are being proactive in assessing your driving situation.

# Growing Centenarians

**O**n the rise and proud of it, centenarians serve as motivation for living healthy, outgoing lives.

The United States Census Bureau reported in 1990 that 37,000 centenarians lived in the U.S. In 2010, that number exploded to 72,000.

In fact, various parts of the world saw similar increases over the past decade. There is no guaranteed strategy to follow for joining the club, but there are many common links between centenarians and how they have lived their lives up to the triple-digit mark. So what gives?

## SOCIAL INTERACTION

Centenarians are usually described as independent and outgoing individuals with an overwhelming sense of optimism. They tend to be very active in social groups or community events, spending large amounts of time with friends and family members.

Healthy centenarians typically live on their own and require little daily care from nursing staff or family. This healthy balance of independence and a social lifestyle is an integral contributing factor to high levels of happiness among centenarians.

## HEART-HEALTHY

Many centenarians follow diets high in fruits and vegetables, and

low in processed foods and fatty meat.

Eating many small meals throughout the day also helps keep metabolism in check and reduces the need for pricy prescriptions or medications that help regulate diets.

In conjunction with healthy food choices, centenarians regularly infuse exercise into their daily routines. Brisk, short walks and light workouts at the gym have been proven to foster long-term health benefits.

Smart food decisions and consistent exercise can help lower blood pressure and maintain healthy cholesterol levels.

## GOOD GENES

Sometimes, it just comes down to simple luck of the draw. As in many aspects of life, genetics are one of a diverse set of factors that determines length of life in humans.

Some centenarians go through their whole lives without having to battle heart disease, cancer or dementia. Others have survived tough situations and diseases, only to come out stronger and more active.

One main step toward sustaining your life is to stay apprised of health issues that potentially could cause damage as you age.



# Depression and the Elderly

If you are like most 60-somethings, you still have goals to accomplish. Fighting through depression might be the last thing on your list.

But statistics show that the diagnosis is prominent among the senior population and is most closely associated with dependency issues, disability and even dementia.

Depression affects more than 6.5 million of the 35 million Americans aged 65 or older, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Experts urge seniors not to be scared by the rising number, but rather to find ways to help lower it.

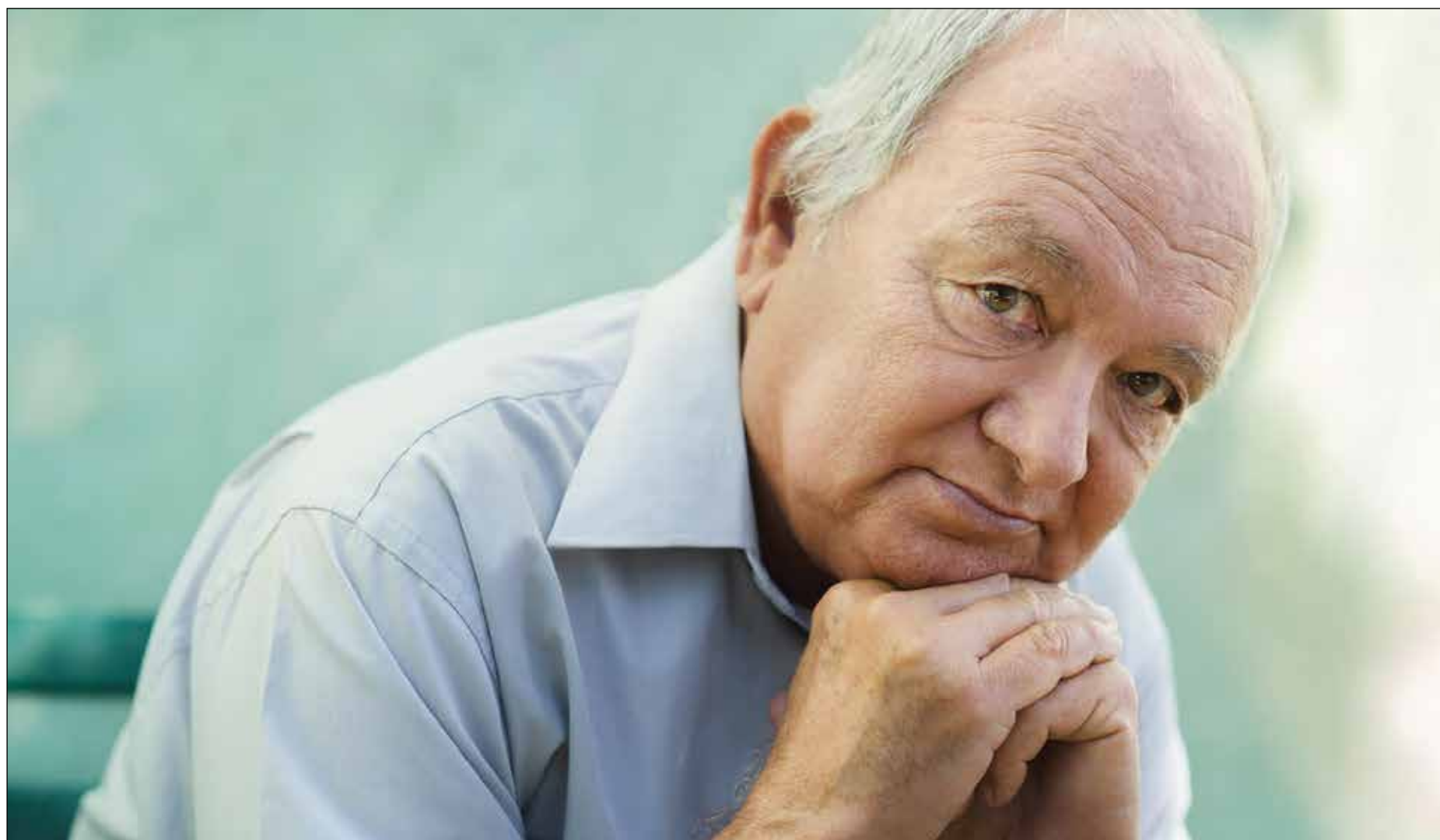
## MAKE NEW FRIENDS

If loneliness is fueling your blues, you may be due for finding some new friends. Camaraderie can help you realize that there are other people in your proximity who are feeling the same way as you.

This awareness will help you feel empathy as you connect with others' feelings and emotions. You may even find yourself giving advice based on your experiences, which can re-establish some of your self-esteem and feelings of value that you may have lost during your battle with depression.

## EXERCISE

The National Institute of



© FOTOLIA / AP

Health recommends an active lifestyle for seniors to produce long-term health benefits and decrease the chance of disabilities that can sometimes lead to depression.

Even moderate exercise and physical activity can improve the health of the elderly, according to the NIH. This doesn't mean you have to go

join your local gym and work out five times per week.

A light walk around the neighborhood or shopping mall can get your heart beating on its way to a healthier pace.

## DIET CHANGES

What we eat and drink can play a major role in determin-

ing how we feel. Researchers agree that there is no magic food or supplement that cures depression, but there have been studies that recommend specific diets aimed at boosting mental health and awareness.

Two such studies — in Spain and London — found that a Mediterranean-style

diet high in vegetables, fruits, fish, nuts, whole grains and olive oil have been proven to improve mood and lessen the risks for depression.

Obviously, steering clear of a diet heavy on fast foods, alcohol or drugs will go a long way toward strengthening your mind and staving off depression.

# Abuse a Painful Problem

**E**very year an estimated 2.1 million elder Americans are victims of abuse, neglect or exploitation, according to the Administration on Aging.

And for every case of abuse or neglect that is reported, the organization says that as many as five go unreported.

Elders – oftentimes seen as easy targets – can alleviate negative attention by remaining vigilant of their surroundings. Even if they are not the ones to take abuse, they can play vital roles in mitigating abuse doled out to their peers by keeping their eyes and minds open for suspicious behavior.

## WARNING SIGNS

There are many red flags associated with elder abuse that, if identified early, can help family members or friends remove a senior from his or her harmful environment.

Inadequately explained fractures, bruises, welts or cuts should immediately raise suspicion, as should lack of basic hygiene or appropriate clothing. Emotional abuse can be just as damaging as physical abuse, too. Allow zero tolerance for caregivers who are verbally aggressive, demeaning or controlling.

## UNIVERSAL ISSUE

No elder is immune to abuse. It can happen to anyone and can occur anywhere. But there are common risk factors that abusers look to exploit.

If an elder is socially isolated, withdrawn or in poor physical shape, they may attract unwanted abusive attention. A surprising fact is that mistreatment is most often perpetrated by the individual's family members.

Experts urge seniors, family members and friends to work together to identify and resolve abuse challenges.

## DON'T BE AFRAID

If you have been a victim of elder abuse,

don't be afraid to come forward. Fear is a tool used by many perpetrators to intimidate, weaken and ultimately abuse seniors.

There are advocates working every day to eliminate elder abuse and they are in your corner. Reach out to your local adult protective services agency for guidance, services, products and consulting services.

They are here to help and are focused on enhancing senior experiences across all settings.



# New 'Plate' for Seniors

**A**s the visual appearance of the nation's food pyramid shifted to a multi-colored plate in 2011, not much changed in the realm of senior dietary standards.

Nutrient-dense food choices and a balance of fluids are still vital parts of the senior food strategy.

Maintaining healthy food and drink habits, as well as plenty of physical activity such as walking and yard work go hand in hand in establishing a healthy lifestyle that can help lengthen lives and improve mental health.

The USDA focuses on three vital parts of the senior food breakdown to promote healthy living.

## MORE FIBER

Fiber is crucial to digestive health and can be consumed through adequate amounts of whole grain products, brightly colored fruits and dark-colored vegetables.

Experts say when you can't go fresh to choose frozen, canned or even dried fruits and vegetables to ensure optimum fiber intake.

Having options in your stockpile or pantry can also help in the face of a storm or natural disaster, when traveling to your local grocery store is not possible.

## FLUID BALANCE

Staying hydrated in the hot summer months can be the difference between fun in the sun or overheated in a hospital bed.

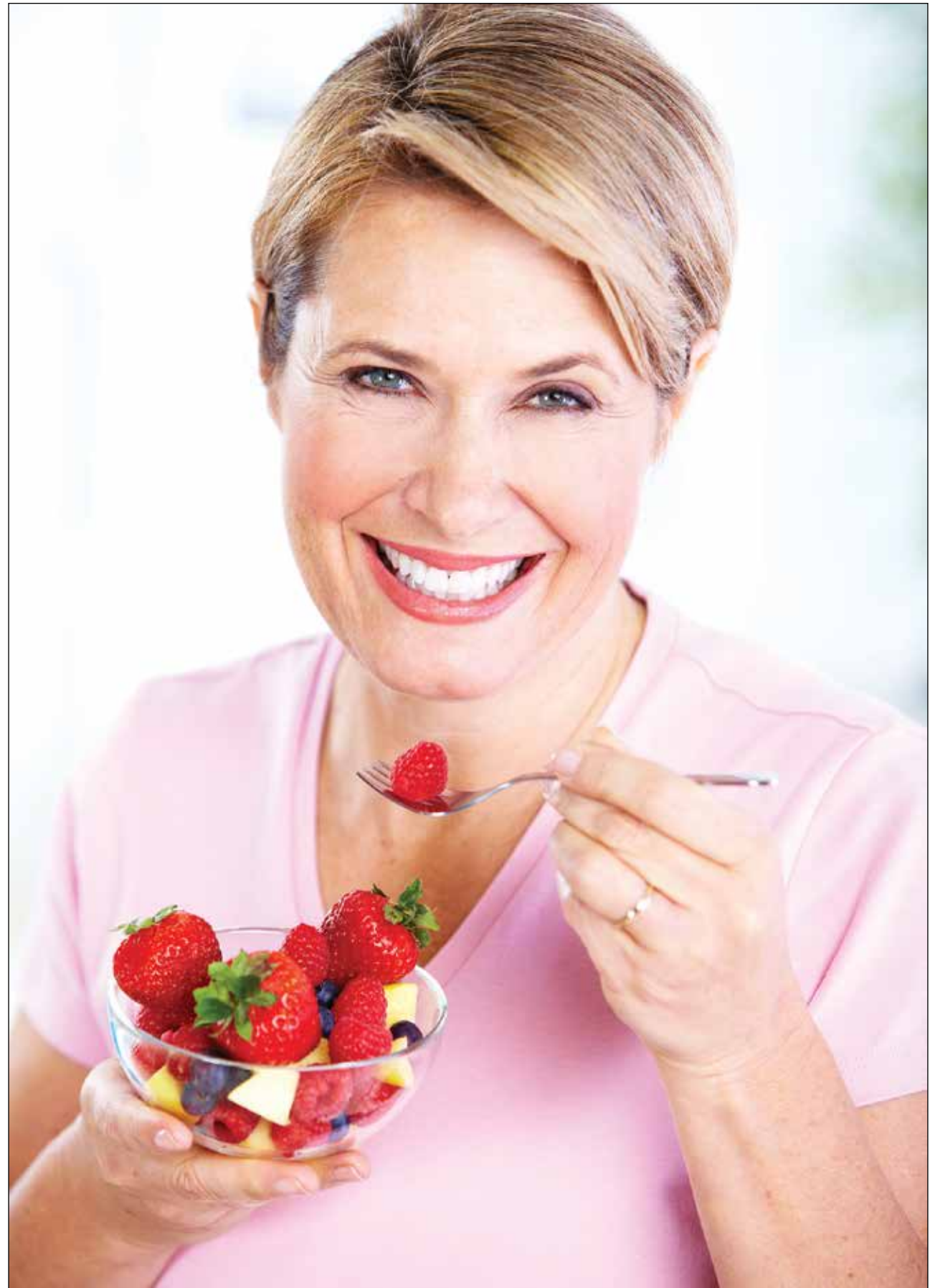
Seniors are urged to drink plenty of water, especially if they are spending extended amounts of time outside. Fluids can also be obtained through foods with high-water content, such as lettuce, vegetable juice and soups.

No matter the season, the USDA wants seniors to pay attention to their bodies and rest with a glass of cold water if needed.

## SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRIENTS

The USDA says that the need for calcium, vitamin D and vitamin B12 can increase with age as some people find it difficult to gain adequate amounts from food alone. But vitamins and pills are meant to serve as supplements to a healthy diet, not as the focal point.

Consult with your physician to plan the healthy integration of a supplement strategy into your daily routine.



# Hearing Loss and Aging

**H**earing problems often start as nuisance before developing into a truly debilitating issue. Luckily, help is available to lessen the hurt of hearing loss.

Aids, medicine and surgery are all viable options available to seniors experiencing hearing loss of various grades. So pay attention to your hearing quality.

Are you having trouble hearing over the telephone? Have you completely worn out the “volume up” button on your television remote control?

If so, then it may be time to speak with your physician to explore your options.

## TYPES OF HEARING LOSS

There are many different types of hearing loss common in seniors. Presbycusis loss comes on slowly with age and affects hearing in both ears. Researchers have linked it with genetic factors.

Conversely, another form of loss, tinnitus, is harder to pin down but even more incapacitating. It causes a ringing or roaring noise and has been labeled as a precursor to high blood pressure or allergies.

## DEVICES CAN HELP

Hearing aids, assistive devices or cochlear implants? There are many options to consider if you decide to purchase a device to help your hearing loss.

Aids are electronic devices that fit comfortably in your ear and make sounds louder. Assistive devices include telephone amplifying devices and TV/radio listening systems. Implants are electronic devices recommended for people with severe hearing loss.

Part of the device is surgically implanted under the skin, and it requires specialized training to adjust.

## TALK TO YOUR PHYSICIAN

Your family doctor may not know exactly what path you should take in remediating your hearing issues, but he or she can point you in the right direction.

An otolaryngologist is a doctor who specializes in medical problems of the ear, nose and throat. You may also be referred to an audiologist, trained to measure and provide services to improve hearing.

Don't be embarrassed to bring up hearing problems to your physician. The longer you put off the appointment, the less you will enjoy life's greatest sounds and experiences.

