



Optimum Life: Holistic Programming Practices for Senior Health and Well-being

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Promoting health and well-being for older people living in senior residential communities is becoming a national focus, particularly following the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic of 2020. As a population, seniors tend to be among the highest at risk for catastrophic illness or chronic disease. Senior living residents are no exception to that rule, with some researchers estimating that approximately **94% of senior living residents are living with at least one chronic condition**¹ and more than 75% are diagnosed with at least two chronic conditions.

Our population health approach to managing chronic conditions focuses on educating, empowering and supporting residents while maintaining an overall focus on wellness. This support includes but is not limited to adhering to physician-directed treatment plans, medication management, dietary recommendations and exercise guidelines. This approach is vital in effectively managing chronic conditions, helping to reduce unnecessary hospital readmissions and helping residents live their healthiest lives possible.

However, helping manage chronic conditions effectively and maintaining the health of an at-risk population requires more than adhering to physician directives and relying on the guidance of clinical experts. True well-being requires treating a person holistically — to address their emotional, social and spiritual needs in addition to their physical needs. In fact, research by the National Academy of Medicine indicates that “medical care is estimated to account for only 10 to 20% of the modifiable contributors to healthy outcomes for a population.”² Social determinants of health, such as time spent engaging in meaningful relationships and engaging in purposeful pursuits, could have a profound effect on the overall health and well-being of the senior population.

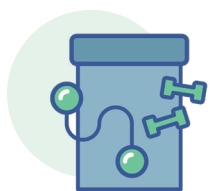
As clinicians, you offer a profound value to your patients by helping them treat the physical causes and symptoms of their conditions, but you may not have the expertise in these other areas that affect overall health and well-being. That is where your partnership with Brookdale could become a critical piece in the health outcomes of your patients. **A community partnership that synergizes medical and lifestyle approaches can potentially create better outcomes.**

Brookdale’s long-standing Optimum Life® framework was created to address the social determinants of health that have become so buzzworthy recently. In addition to providing a fulfilling living environment, transportation, access to medical care and nutritious food, Brookdale leverages our decades of expertise in senior care to help residents achieve well-being in every area of life. That’s why our Optimum Life well-being model positions us as the best partner to help your patients to achieve the best outcomes.

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The Optimum Life framework comprises six elements that factor into patient well-being:



1. Physical

Options for exercise, nutritious food and collaborative clinical approaches and partnerships

Exercise and physical activity have been shown in multiple studies³ to reduce risk of developing multiple chronic conditions including dementia, improve outcomes for those who have existing chronic conditions and improve mental health. Brookdale has a signature exercise program called Brookdale Fitness B-Fit that is designed as a holistic exercise experience to meet the recommendations of the American College of Sports Medicine. We also support resident walking clubs, music and movement programs and more. Additionally, our award-winning dining program provides chef-inspired nutritious food that meets a variety of dietary restrictions.



2. Emotional

A feeling of security and freedom to express the full range of emotions

According to the **National Institute on Aging**⁴, depression is a common problem among older⁵ adults, but it is **not** a normal part of aging. In fact, studies show that most older adults feel satisfied with their lives, despite having more illnesses or physical problems. However, important life changes that happen as we get older may cause feelings of uneasiness, stress and sadness. Our teams are trained to detect signs of depression and assist with non-pharmacological interventions as much as possible. The pandemic highlighted the need for emotional support for residents, so resources were created for community associates.



3. Social

An ongoing sense of connectedness with others

According to research done by aging expert Julianne Holt-Lundstedt, participants with stronger social relationships showed a **50% increased likelihood of survival**⁶ following a traumatic event. Many other studies have shown social connections to be crucial to health and well-being for older adults. Life at a Brookdale community is built on social connection. Our CARE program helps new residents get connected in the community as soon as possible. Residents are closely observed, and collaborative care reviews serve to identify residents who are socially isolated and assist them with getting connected. In light of the isolation imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, a team of experts have devised additional resources for community teams to help residents reintegrate socially.



4. Purposeful

The maintenance of a sense of identity that brings meaning to life

Having a sense of purpose is associated with a **reduction in dementia risk**⁷, and a sense of purpose has also been shown to **add years to life**⁸. Brookdale's engagement model is built around helping each resident find social connections and purpose rather than participation in group activities. Resident-driven clubs and individual purposeful pursuits are encouraged through relationships with staff who provide support.



5. Spiritual

Lifting spirits in ways that matter to bring peace and joy

Spiritual well-being and involvement in a religious community are associated with **better health outcomes**⁹. Our signature spiritual program, the Ageless Spirit, is designed to provide outlets for universal spiritual expressions such as kindness, gratitude, appreciation of nature and celebrating aging. We also support resident's religious preferences and practices through the provision of religious services and the celebration of traditions.



6. Intellectual

To stay engaged with current and new interests

Brain health is **dependent on a holistic lifestyle**¹⁰ that includes physical activity, good food and novel and complex cognitive challenges and social connections. Our BrainFit programs combine these elements to provide the opportunities for residents to thrive intellectually. A class called *Know your Brain* guides residents to make a brain health plan. *Flex Your Brain* provides weekly mental fitness workouts, and *Grow Your Brain* projects give opportunities for residents to work together on a complex project to stimulate new learning and growth.

Conclusion

The aim of our Optimum Life well-being culture is to help each resident to achieve their greatest possible state of health, happiness, life satisfaction and meaning, as each of these dimensions is shown through research to impact health outcomes. Rather than focusing exclusively on maladies and medical issues, we encourage residents to concentrate on what is going well in their lives and to build on their strengths. We meet each resident where they are in all six dimensions of well-being to help them continue to grow and live their best life. In all this, we believe our suite of services, multidisciplinary care teams and collaboration with primary care providers can lead to happier, healthier residents.





Carol Cummings, BSN, RN, Senior Director Optimum Life

Carol is a registered nurse and a nationally recognized expert on senior health and well-being. For the first half of her 30-year nursing career, Carol cared for older adults in clinical settings, including hospitals and home health. For the past 19 years she has worked for Brookdale as a wellness professional at the community and corporate levels. In her current role as the senior director of Optimum Life engagement and innovation

for Brookdale, Carol is responsible for the creation of programs and services designed to support holistic well-being for older adults. She has earned multiple awards for her programs, including the International Council on Active Aging Innovator Award and the Assisted Living Federation of America's Best of the Best. In addition, Carol serves as one of the executive producers of the Celebrate Aging Film Festival, which won the Argentum Best of the Best award in 2018. Carol's true passion is to empower older adults to live life to the fullest. She writes a monthly blog and creates many health and wellness resources for Brookdale. Carol earned her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Northern Illinois University.

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