

An Anthology of
Timely Tidbits, Personal Stories, and Fascinating Factoids for

Savvy Jersey Seniors



Advice, Humor, and Miscellaneous Words of "Wisdom"
For & About Seniors

Volume 5, Number 3 & 4 • March and April 2024

Welcome!

In this latest edition of *Savvy Jersey Seniors* for March and April of 2024 we present Benita Cooper's story of the NPO she founded 15 years ago, "The Best Day of My Life So Far."

Benita's 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization offers five programs: Storytelling Groups at a full network of nursing homes, senior centers and living communities, Story Pop-Up Events in public venues to bring together whole communities, Story Cure Seminars including Lunch and Learn formats to share intergenerational engagement steps and tips, a Social Connection Work Group to bring together practitioners and thought leaders, and Benita's latest program: Grand Camp Youth Leadership Academy, which piloted here in South Jersey at Haddonfield Middle School.

And, of course, we also have our usual potpourri of information that we feel might make a difference to our senior friends across South Jersey, including some notes on

- How to become a volunteer election poll workers (and earn \$300 for a very long day's work twice a year),
- Why our health system may not be equipped to deal with seniors with disabilities,
- A blood test that may help detect early Alzheimer's, and
- A short primer on what is and is not hospice care.

By the way, please don't forget that we always welcome your ideas for any topic that you'd like to see us tackle. As we've noted previously, we're especially interested in the avocations and hobbies of our readers.



In that vein, remember that we especially want to hear about the volunteer efforts that seniors across South Jersey are making on behalf of the literally thousands of non-profit organizations that serve our region. Just drop us a note at savvyjerseyseniors.com.

Time for Stories: "The Best Day of My Life So Far"

By Benita Cooper

What if there's a place where there's always room for one more? One more open voice, one more listening ear. Where there's a time set aside for memories to take shape as stories, for older adults to open up at their own pace, for younger people to slow down and listen? What if my late grandma's friendship with me—built story by story, phone call by phone call—and the feeling I felt after every single call, which can only be described as "The Best Day of My Life So Far," can inspire a movement for old and young to come together through sharing stories and simply stories, all heart, no frills?

In 2009, I borrowed a table for an hour a week during my lunch break at Philadelphia Senior Center, which was just a quick walk from my home at the time, to sit with older adults and listen to their life stories. I also started a blog with their permission. After each session, I would post their stories and my reflections of our experience—soon, family members started following, reading and writing back.



Originally, I told the senior center I would be there for six weeks; by week three or four, the senior center, participants and I all knew it needed to continue—participants, and myself too, were living their lives looking forward to our time together. Our sessions started to fill their lives and mine with a sense of purpose. That group has never stopped meeting since, evolving into Zoom and then hybrid formats with the pandemic but never stopping. Hundreds of older adults, volunteers and visitors have shared one storytelling table. The time and space we carved out gave older adults freedom to be themselves.

The real "story" we are co-writing is about our need for genuine human connection and the power of storytelling to get us there. Our mission is to provide a cure for social isolation—by empowering older adults to share life stories and inspiring human connection across generational and other social divides.

Now, in 2024, our 15th year, our 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization offers five programs to bring our mission to different audiences: besides our weekly namesake Storytelling Groups at a full network of nursing homes, senior centers and living communities, we also offer: Story Pop-Up Events in public venues to bring together whole communities, Story Cure Seminars including Lunch and learn formats to share intergenerational engagement steps and tips, a Social



Connection Work Group to bring together practitioners and thought leaders, and our latest program: Grand Camp Youth Leadership Academy, which piloted right here in South Jersey at Haddonfield Middle School.

Our Grand Camp experience has been incredible from start to finish. We began with seven months of behind-the-scenes preparation in partnership with Haddonfield School District, launched the curriculum with a high-energy in-person kickoff event led by me and Youth Ambassador Harrison Berman (high school student on our volunteer team whose entire family has been instrumental in building this program), followed by 4 weeks of digital learning modules (short video tutorials of me teaching middle school students storytelling techniques).

Each tutorial ends with a fun, easy real-life story-listening activity for the students to enrich relationships with their chosen older adult conversation partners.

After the learning weeks, leadership from the School District and the School hosted a multi-media Expo for the students to showcase all the heartfelt stories they had heard, as well as their own personal reflections. The room was glowing with a sense of humanity, hope and purpose. I was moved. The power of storytelling is undeniable. The more Best Day programs can be hosted by more venues, the more people's lives we can reach and connect, and the more communities we can build.

To support us, please consider making a donation of any size on our website www.bestdayofmylifefar.org. And if you know of a venue that would be a good host for one of our programs, or a business that would like to sponsor one of our programs, please let us know at info@bestdayofmylifefar.org.

Health System Not Ready for Seniors with Disabilities?

The number of older adults with disabilities—difficulty with walking, seeing, hearing, memory, cognition, or performing daily tasks such as bathing or using the bathroom—will soar in the decades ahead, as Baby Boomers enter their 70s, 80s, and 90s

But many observers believe that the health care system isn't ready to address their needs. That became painfully obvious during the Covid-19 pandemic, when older adults with disabilities had trouble getting treatments and hundreds of thousands died.

Now, the Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institutes of Health are targeting some failures that led to those problems.

One initiative strengthens access to medical treatments, equipment, and web-based programs for people with disabilities.



The other recognizes that people with disabilities, including older adults, are a separate population with special health concerns that need more research and attention.

Lisa Iezzoni, 69, a professor at Harvard Medical School who has lived with multiple sclerosis since her early 20s and is widely considered the godmother of research on disability, called the developments “an important attempt to make health care more equitable for people with disabilities.”

“For too long, medical providers have failed to address change in society, changes in technology, and changes in the kind of assistance that people need,” she says.

New Jersey Needs Election Day Poll Workers...Could You Use an Extra \$300?

Volunteer to be a poll worker on Election Day. To apply you must be a citizen of the US and a resident of New Jersey.

In addition, you must be a registered voter in your county, at least 16 years of age, and not a candidate in the election in which you would serve as a poll worker.

The day is long...election workers start at 5 AM and finish between 8 and 9 PM. But the stipend is \$300.

Workers are needed for both the Primary Election on Tuesday, June 4, and the General Election on Tuesday, November 5. For more information, contact your County Board of Elections.

WHO CAN APPLY?

YOU CAN APPLY TO SERVE AS A POLL WORKER IN NEW JERSEY IF YOU:

- Are a United States citizen and a resident of New Jersey
- Are a registered voter in the county in which you reside
- Are at least 16 years of age—college and high school students are encouraged to apply
 - Note: Those under 18 years of age will work limited hours per shift and do not have to be registered to vote—contact the County Board of Elections for further information
- Are not running as a candidate in this election

More Vaccines Free Under Medicare

Before 2023, older adults with Medicare often faced high co-payments for preventive vaccines, which posed an extra financial burden for people already struggling. In 2021, Medicare enrollees paid \$234 million in out-of-pocket costs for recommended vaccines covered under Part D.

The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 brought good news for people with Medicare: Vaccines covered under Medicare prescription drug plans and Medicaid became free starting in 2023.

This means there are no more co-payments—or deductibles to meet—for any vaccinations recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP).

This list includes the vaccines for shingles, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis, also known as whooping cough).



Medicare

Why is this change so important for older adults?

In the past, many older adults have gone without life-saving vaccines, like shingles and Tdap, because their budgets couldn't stretch to cover out-of-pocket expenses.

With the elimination of cost sharing, vaccines are more accessible to the people who need them to stay healthy.

Learn which vaccinations are fully covered by Medicare and Medicaid and which ones are recommended for older adults.

Vaccines have been covered in different ways under Parts B and D. Part B vaccines have been cost-free. These include the annual influenza vaccine, pneumococcal shots and the COVID-19 vaccines.

Hepatitis B shots are cost-free for anyone at medium or high risk of contracting the virus.

For Part D vaccines, including the Tdap and shingles vaccinations, people have generally had to share the cost through co-payments, coinsurance, or other expenses.

Some Medicaid enrollees have incurred out-of-pocket expenses for recommended vaccinations, too.



Because of the Inflation Reduction Act, Part D vaccines are now treated on the same cost-free basis as those under Part B. No-cost coverage continues for the flu, pneumococcal, and COVID-19 vaccines, and hepatitis B for people whose doctors recommend it.

In 2023, the Tdap, RSV, and shingles vaccines joined the list of no-cost vaccinations.

The ACIP Adult Immunization Schedule recommends these vaccines for older adults with additional risk factors or other health needs: hepatitis A, varicella, meningococcal A, C, W, Y (Men ACWY), meningococcal B (MenB); and haemophilus influenzae type B (Hib).

Those vaccines are also now cost-free.

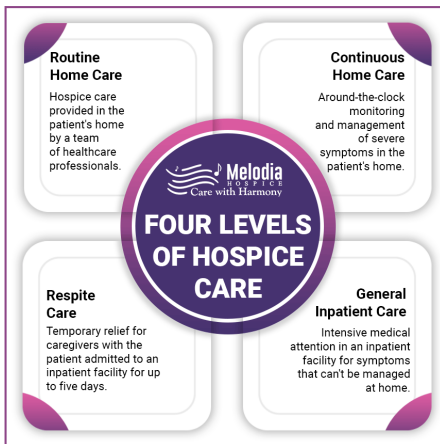
What Is Hospice?

Hospice care provides relief from pain and other distressing symptoms. It affirms life and regards dying as a normal process.

It intends neither to hasten nor postpone death, but it integrates the psychological, spiritual aspects of patient care, offers a support system to help patients live as actively as possible until death, and it also offers a support system to help the family cope during the patient's illness, and into their bereavement.



Hospice care focuses on caring for the whole patient, not just their admitting diagnosis. The interdisciplinary team can include an RN, case manager, certified nursing aide, social worker, chaplain, complementary therapists, volunteers and bereavement counselors.



Medicare and other insurance companies have their specific rules, but in general, the cost of hospice services from a Medicare-certified Hospice Agency is fully covered and there are no co-pays. Most hospice patients have Medicare, and if they don't, many insurance plans pay for hospice services in a manner like Medicare. When you apply to an agency for hospice service all the details will be reviewed and carefully explained.

According to Homeland at Home, the general eligibility rules for Medicare say you will qualify for hospice care if you meet these conditions:

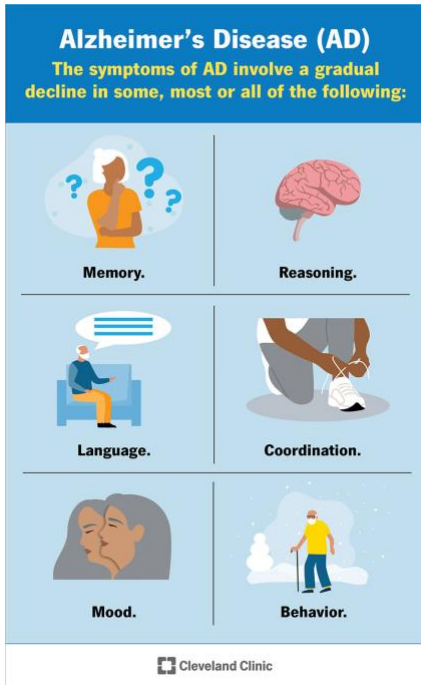
- Your primary care provider or MD specialist provides a terminal prognosis, with life expectancy of 6 months or less.
- You opt for comfort care instead of active treatments, such as surgeries, chemotherapy and radiation.
- You sign a statement choosing hospice care instead of other types of treatment for your terminal illness and related conditions.

New Blood Test Helps to Predict Early Alzheimer's

Scientists have uncovered a new potential diagnostic tool for recognizing early Alzheimer's that offers a non-invasive, commercially viable technique for early disease detection in clinical settings.

Alzheimer's affects roughly 5.8 million Americans, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.





The progressive disease is the most common form of dementia and is associated with memory loss and cognitive decline in regions of the brain involved in memory, thought, and language.

The disease is thought to be caused by the abnormal buildup of proteins in and around the cells in our brains, but exactly what triggers this process is still unclear.

Today, there is no known cure for Alzheimer's Disease. However, new medications may offer relief to patients and slow down the development of symptoms, particularly if the disease is diagnosed early.

One of the most useful signs for detecting early Alzheimer's is a blood protein called phosphorylated tau, or "p-tau."

Today, levels of p-tau biomarkers are usually detected in cerebrospinal fluid—the watery liquid that surrounds and protects our brain and spinal cord. However, accessing this fluid requires a highly invasive procedure.

But, according to a new study, levels of p-tau 217 in the blood can be an equally reliable measure of the abnormal buildup of proteins in the brain. This diagnostic technique is already commercially available.

Hearing Aids May Help People Live Longer

New research suggests hearing aids may help people live longer, showing that such devices reduce the risk of death by almost 25 percent.

Hearing loss affects tens of millions of people around the world—but only one in 10 who need hearing aids use them.

"We found that adults with hearing loss who regularly used hearing aids had a 24 percent lower risk of mortality than those who never wore them," says Dr. Janet Choi.

"These results are exciting because they suggest that hearing aids may play a protective role in people's health and prevent early death."

Previous research has shown that untreated hearing loss can result in a reduced life span, and higher levels of depression and dementia, but there's been little research examining if the use of hearing aids can reduce the risk of death.



Dr. Choi says that the new study represents the most comprehensive analysis to date on the relationship between hearing aid use and mortality.

Daily Multi-Vitamins Appear to Slow Cognitive Aging

Taking daily multivitamins appears to slow cognitive aging by about two years in older adults, three new studies show.

The studies showed a multivitamin provided a “modest benefit” on global cognition over 2 years, compared to a placebo.

Global cognition includes brain activities such as reasoning, attention, and planning. The multivitamin showed “a statistically significant benefit” for episodic memory, but not in executive function and attention.



The researchers’ analysis of the three studies “showed strong evidence of benefits for both global cognition and episodic memory. The authors estimate that the daily multivitamin slowed global cognitive aging by the equivalent of two years compared to placebo.” (Cognitive aging is a change in mental functions, such as learning, thinking, and memory, that happens when people age.) The studies did not specify which vitamins and minerals are responsible for the slowdown in memory loss.



Ageing Baby Boomers Want to Feel Safe If They Need Help

We’ve all read that the aging boomers want to stay at home as long as possible, and that still holds true.

LeadingAge, however, conducted a survey of older baby boomers to gather insights into how they think about their quality of life, if they become physically disabled or cognitively impaired and need long-term services and supports.

Asked what would be important if they were in a position of needing help with daily activities, being safe was ranked the most important consideration, higher even than being around family or friends.

Based on survey responses, here's what's most important to baby boomers (on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the most important):

- Be safe – 9.5
- Have access to the outdoors – 8.8
- Be physically active – 8.6
- Get out on a daily basis – 7.9
- Live in your current community – 7.7
- Make a difference – 6.9
- Work – 5.1
- Be around family – 8.9
- Be around friends – 8.7
- Live in your own home – 8.5
- Have meaningful social activities – 7.8
- Practice my religion – 7.5
- Travel – 6.6

How to Relieve Symptoms of Raynaud's Disease

Raynaud's disease, often characterized by telltale cold fingers and toes, is more than just a fleeting discomfort for people. The narrowing of blood vessels leads to decreased blood flow to the affected areas.

This most commonly affects the fingers and toes but can also impact the nose, ears and lips. The reduced blood flow turns the affected areas pale or blue while feeling cold and numb.

The areas may turn red and throb or tingle as blood flow returns.



Here are six recommended ways to alleviate the symptoms of Raynaud's disease.

- *Biofeedback training.* This technique employs electronic monitoring to convey information about physiological processes. By understanding your body's responses, you can, with practice, learn to promote relaxation and warmth in extremities.
- *Calcium channel blockers.* Medications such as amlodipine or nifedipine can help relax the blood vessels and increase blood flow to extremities. These drugs have been proven effective in decreasing the severity and frequency of Raynaud's attacks in many patients.
- *Protect yourself from the cold.* Simple measures, such as wearing gloves, can make a significant difference. Ensure you dress warmly and limit exposure to cold environments.
- *Avoid caffeine and smoking.* Both will constrict blood vessels and limit blood flow.
- *Regular exercise.* Physical activity can help improve circulation.
- *Stress management.* Since stress can help trigger Raynaud's episodes, techniques like deep breathing, meditation, and yoga can be beneficial. Yoga in hot or warm settings may help because it promotes blood circulation.

Nausea and Stomach Problems Could Be Signs of a Heart Attack

In a recent segment on *The Today Show*, Chantrise Holliman, a mother, wife and heart health educator, shared the story of her heart attack her and what seemed like the fairly benign symptoms that accompanied it.

Holliman experienced nausea, vomiting and mild chest pressure. The first two symptoms—which aren't commonly associated with heart attacks—led her to believe the sensations had more to do with her dinner the night before than a serious medical concern.

Like Holliman, many people don't know that stomach symptoms can, indeed, be signs of a heart attack. While not the most common warning sign (chest pain is most reported), nausea is also



not uncommon during a cardiac event, according to Dr. Sean Heffron, a cardiologist at NYU Langone Health.

It "tends to depend somewhat on which blood vessel in the heart is affected," Heffron explained. "Additionally, nausea is more commonly seen in women, as is vomiting."

Other heart attack signs in women include jaw pain, neck pain, a dull feeling of chest discomfort, upper abdomen pain, back pain

and excessive tiredness, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"As far as we know, it's rare that [nausea is] the only symptom of a heart attack," Heffron explains. In Holliman's case, for example, she also said she noticed pressure in her chest.

"And, certainly, a heart attack is far from the most common cause of nausea," Heffron says. Food poisoning, stomach flu, and motion sickness are much more common culprits.

So, you don't have to panic the next time you feel nauseated. But if you notice additional heart attack symptoms along with nausea or vomiting—like chest pain, sweating, heart palpitations or dizziness—it could be cause for concern. This is doubly true for someone with risk factors of heart disease like high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or diabetes.

Salt Substitutes Could Help Reduce Risk of High Blood Pressure

Overconsumption of salt is a global driver of cardiovascular disease and high blood pressure. New research indicates that using salt substitutes—flavorful food additives with less sodium—instead of table salt could help reduce the risk of high blood pressure.

A recent study revealed that older adults with blood pressure above normal who used a salt substitute had lower incidences of developing high blood pressure.



They also had lower blood pressure overall compared to those who used table salt. Additionally, incidences of low blood pressure, a potential health concern for those with healthy blood pressure, were nearly identical between the two groups.

This means the salt substitute is beneficial not only to people with hypertension, which has been demonstrated in previous studies, but also to people with normal blood pressure.

Seventy-five percent of people over age 60 have high blood pressure. And even if you're on medication, you want to lower your sodium intake.

If you think you're eating a low-salt diet because you don't salt your grilled corn or soup, think about that frozen pizza or canned soup you just heated up. Those items are loaded with stealth salt, too.



And the largest randomized clinical trial ever to look at the effects of reducing salt intake, published this year in *The Lancet*, found that lowering sodium led to improved symptoms like swelling, fatigue and coughing—and an overall better quality of life.

So what can you do? An easy way to spot low-sodium foods is to look for those in which sodium is 5 percent or less of the daily value; anything in the 20 percent range is high-sodium.

Aim for 1,500 to 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day. And instead, of eating processed foods, get back into the kitchen and cook, keeping the recipes simple, using whole ingredients, and using seasonings that have no added sodium.

Grandparents Day at the Haddonfield Children's Sculpture Zoo

The Haddonfield Outdoor Sculpture Trust attracted more than 175 adults and children to its annual Grandparents Day at the Children's Sculpture Zoo on April 27.

The Trust gave away more than 100 animal and art books (courtesy of Larry Abrams at "BookSmiles"), sent scores of painted faces out into the world, and distributed enough animal crackers, stickers, and miniature plastic animals to send everyone home happy.





And, thanks to John Giannotti, the internationally recognized sculptor and creator of “Haddy” (Haddonfield’s life-size dinosaur sculpture), dozens of parents and children were educated on exactly how a sculpture comes to life.

Since its creation in 2019 by HOST, the Children’s Outdoor Sculpture Zoo has become a significant attraction for pre-school, nursery school, and elementary school age children from throughout the region.

Located in the Tatem Memorial Garden at 338 Kings Highway East in the Borough of Haddonfield, it is the only Outdoor Sculpture Zoo in the nation dedicated exclusively to children. This unique attraction currently features seven bronze animal sculptures, as well as a “Zoo Animal Bench.”



“Ooo, I just felt the good cholesterol kick the bad cholesterol.”



“You can come down now, Everett. The children have grown up and left.”

The People Who Have Helped Make SJS Happen

Our contributors have included (in alphabetical order) Daryl Albury, Karen Berg, Lucille Bondi, Lou Ciavoletta, Courtney Colletti, Benita Cooper, Deanne Farrell, Bev Harting, Churchill Huston, Janis Stuart, Antoinette Maciolek, Nancie Merritt, Vikki Monaghan, Joe Murphy, Mary Ann Oster, Joanne Rafferty, Charlotte Ryan, Arlene Scornavacca, Barry Sparks, Phyllis St. Onge, Phyllis Weber, and Jared Willmann.

Contact Us:

And remember that if you have story ideas, comments, or criticisms, you can e-mail us at savvyjerseyseniors.com.

