

NEWS FROM: THE ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION

For more information, contact:
Maureen Cozine, RWJF News Line, 609/627-5937
Brigid Sanner, *Active for Life*, 214/553-0621

For Immediate Release

FOUNDATION AWARDS GRANTS TO HELP MID-LIFE AND OLDER AMERICANS GET ACTIVE

Active for Life funds programs to increase physical activity among people age 50 plus

Princeton, N.J. (December 10, 2002) - The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) today announced that \$8.7 million has been awarded to fund nine four-year community grants to test the effectiveness of two model programs targeted to help mid-life and older Americans become more physically active. Funding of the sites (see attached list for details) will begin in January 2003.

Physical inactivity is one of the greatest health risks for mid-life and older adults. It contributes to illnesses and disabilities such as arthritis, cancer, diabetes, heart disease and stroke. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicate that more than 78% of adults age 50 and older are at risk for health problems related to lack of regular and sustained physical activity. "The good news is that people age 50 plus who incorporate regular physical activity into their daily lives tend to live longer and have a better overall quality of life," said Active for Life Program Director Marcia G. Ory, Ph.D., MPH. "By being active, mid-life and older adults will either avoid or better manage chronic illness and disabilities."

The CDC recommends that people need 30 minutes or more of moderate-intensity physical activity on all, or most, days of the week.

"By examining two types of behavior intervention programs in real world settings we hope to learn more about what community organizations can do to help diverse groups of people age 50 and older become and remain more active," adds Ory.

The Active for Life community grants will study the effectiveness of telephone and group-based behavior intervention programs. The Active for Life grantee sites will each recruit 1,000 people age 50 and older to participate in programs that will test, replicate, and expand the group and telephone-based programs with the goal of increasing physical activity among mid-life and older adults at the community level.

The telephone-based program provides telephone and mail guidance and offers strategies to help individuals incorporate physical activities into their daily lives. An initial group orientation and an individual introductory planning session are included to help participants get started and exercise safely. Participants are also invited to attend regular events that cover a variety of health topics.

In the group-based program participants meet weekly in small groups to develop the behavioral skills they need to build moderate to vigorous physical activity into their daily lives. Facilitated discussions, a self-help workbook, and interactive activities provide the basis of the weekly sessions.

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"We want to learn how to deliver research-based physical activity programs to large numbers of mid-life and older adults and to sustain such programs through existing community institutions like community or senior centers, recreation centers, public health departments, housing authorities, and religious institutions," says RWJF Senior Program Officer Robin Mockenhaupt, Ph.D. ""

Mockenhaupt adds, "Active for Life is a multi faceted initiative of the RWJF, which includes the community-based grants under the direction of the National Program Office at Texas A&M University System, and a marketing and policy component to support communities in the promotion of more active lifestyles for mid-life and older Americans. The marketing and policy activities, also funded by RWJF, are managed by the AARP, headquartered in Washington, D.C."

More detailed information about the program is on the RWJF web site www.rwjf.org, the Active for Life web site www.activeforlife.info, and at www.aarp.org.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, based in Princeton, N.J., is the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to health and health care. It concentrates its grant making in four goal areas: to assure that all Americans have access to basic health care at reasonable cost; to improve care and support for people with chronic health conditions; to promote healthy communities and lifestyles; and to reduce the personal, social and economic harm caused by substance abuse -- tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs.

The Texas A&M University System Health Science Center, School of Rural Public Health in College Station, TX is the first school of public health to focus on the often-unique health issues and needs of rural populations. The mission of the School of Rural Public Health is to improve the health of communities with emphasis on rural and underserved populations, through education, research, service, outreach and creative partnerships. Texas A&M is the only land-grant institution in the state of Texas.

AARP is a non-profit, non-partisan membership organization for people 50 and over. AARP provides information and resources; advocates on legislative, consumer, and legal issues; assists members to serve their communities; and offers a wide range of unique benefits, special products, and services for members.

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