

Despite ailments, couple enjoys independence as they age



“ When family members become caregivers for their loved ones, they stay healthier and independent longer. ”

Photo caption: Suikeng Xu is a caregiver for her husband, Yu Man, who turned 82 in 2016.

Every morning, Suikeng Xu [SWAY-KOHng Yooh] and wakes at 7 a.m. and prepares the day's three meals for her and her husband, Yu Man [yoo MAWN]. Because he has diabetes, she makes his food low in sugar, salt and unhealthy fats.

Suikeng learned how to prepare healthy meals from a nutrition class through the National Family Caregiver Support Program and now she prepares a lot more vegetables. That class was one of her first steps in becoming her husband's caregiver.

Supported under the state Department of Social and Health Services, the National Family Caregiver Support Program funds a range of services for family and informal caregivers, providing information, training, access to services, counseling, and other supports. When family members become caregivers for their loved ones, they stay healthier and independent longer and avoid expensive institutional care that separates them from their community.

Natives of Shanghai, Suikeng and Yu Man moved to Seattle 18 years ago.

“When we first came to Seattle, we loved it very much,” says Suikeng, “because of the people and the environment. It was very good for us. A lot better than Shanghai.”

Over time Suikeng's husband developed high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and sleep apnea. He also had back surgery, which left him dependent on a walker.

Their National Family Caregiver Support Program case worker, who speaks Mandarin and understands the language and cultural challenges they face, helps

them navigate an otherwise complicated system to access the care they need.

At 77, Suikeng has her own health concerns. She developed eye problems and relies on a machine to help her breathe at night. “I have chronic illnesses like my husband,” she says, “but mine aren't as bad.”

Healthier Washington Linkages:

In partnership with DSHS, the Medicaid demonstration's Initiative 2 will give older adults new options for staying independent and in their homes by offering support for unpaid family caregivers and expanding eligibility for targeted long-term services and supports.



See more stories at hca.wa.gov/VoicesHW

Learn more about Healthier Washington at hca.wa.gov/hw

#VoicesHW