Staying Independent Longer – It’s A Matter of Balance
By Janet Hackert, Regional Nutrition and Health Education Specialist

For those who are concerned about falling, University of Missouri Extension has a class in February through March in Maysville that can help them stay independent longer. It is a **Matter of Balance**.

The Matter of Balance class uses a curriculum developed by the Frank L. Mitchell Trauma Center and Boston University that helps people address concerns about falling. The eight-session class is designed to benefit community-dwelling older adults who have sustained a fall in the past, or perhaps simply are having balance issues and are worried that they may fall and lose the ability to take care of themselves. It is also for anyone who is making choices to restrict their usual activities because of a fear of falling. But the class is really for those who are interested in making some changes so that they can feel more comfortable and confident living on their own.

Participants in the class will identify their challenges and concerns (those things that might keep them from leading the active social lifestyle they have enjoyed earlier in life) and find solutions that work for them as individuals. More specifically they will learn to:

- View falls and the fear of falling as controllable.
- Set realistic goals for increasing their activity levels.
- Change their environment to reduce fall risk factors.
- Do exercises designed to increase strength and balance.

During the course, class members will examine their own situations and determine what and how they can adjust to lessen the likelihood of falling. Just because someone feels less stable on their feet does not mean they have to feel trapped by their circumstances. The bottom line is that Matter of Balance participants learn to find balance – physical balance to reduce the risk of falling, as well as a balance between a healthy awareness of limitations and the changes they can make in their behavior and environment to make living independently a more realistic expectation and a more positive experience.

The classes will be held on Tuesdays and Thursdays from February 24 through March 19, 2015, from 9-11 a.m. in the meeting room at Independent Farmers Bank on the square in Maysville. The class is free of charge because Living Hope Food Pantry and Thrift Shop received a Healthy Eating Active Living grant to help the community in their efforts to improve
their lives. This grant is sponsored in whole or in part by Live Well St. Joe (through Social Innovation for Missouri) and Healthy Partnerships (a partnership of Heartland Foundation, Heartland Health, and North Kansas City Hospital). This is the same grant that has already brought two, Stay Strong, Stay Healthy classes and two, Home Food Preservation classes to the area. Classes are being taught by University of Missouri Extension.

The Matter of Balance class will also be offered at two other locations this spring. Hackert and Neal will offer it in Albany from 1-3 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays, March 31 – April 23, 2015 at the Gentry County Extension Center, 1109 Birch St. Hackert and Jessica Trussell will teach the class in Hamilton on Monday and Wednesday mornings, 9-11, at the Hamilton United Methodist Church, 104 Samuel St. Both of these classes have a $10 participant fee and scholarships are available.

Those interested in attending any of the classes are asked to contact Janet Hackert (660-425-6434 or HackertJ@missouri.edu), Connie Neal (660-582-8101 or NealCA@missouri.edu) or Jessica Trussell (660-646-0811 or TrussellJL@missouri.edu) to register. Also, if you need special accommodations to participate, please inform us when you register. Class size is limited so registration is strongly encouraged to insure a spot in the class.

(written 1/23/15)