

CARING FOR THE ENTIRE SENIOR: MIND, BODY AND SOUL

CARING FOR YOUR PARENTS: EDUCATION FOR THE FAMILY CAREGIVER®



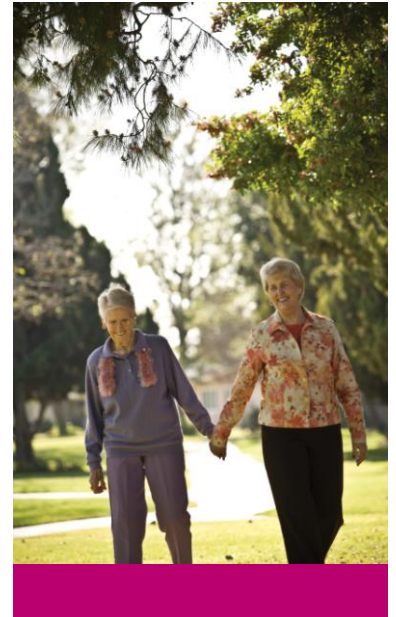
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Instead
SENIOR CARE®
To us, it's personal.

Most people look on aging with fear. That's for good reason, because there is a lot at stake. From injuries, to losing independence – we all worry about what happens as we continue to age.

Both you and your parents know that frailty and loss of independence can be the beginning of a downward spiral. In fact, new research conducted for the Home Instead Senior Care® network, confirmed that 90% of seniors put loss of independence at the top of their list of aging worries. It is a valid concern and one that is acknowledged by family caregivers and professionals who work with older adults every day.

However there is good news about aging. While staying physically active may be a challenge for seniors, getting your parents moving can help prevent and even reverse signs of frailty.

Dr. Stephanie Studenski, one of the nation's foremost authorities and researchers on mobility, balance disorders, and falls in older adults, says that through activity, seniors build both physical and mental reserves that can help their bodies better tolerate problems that come with aging.



In this workshop, we're going to give you the information you need to determine if your parents are being affected – both physically and emotionally – by aging.

We'll talk about the fears brought about by aging, what constitutes frailty and how it can be prevented or even reversed. Then, we'll give you a number of exercises to help your senior loved ones stay strong – mind, body and soul.

PHYSICAL SYMPTONS AND EMOTIONAL CHANGES

How do you recognize the signs of aging in your loved one? Here are the physical and emotional changes to look for:

- **Does your parent seem tired all the time?** Persistent fatigue and loss of energy are two of the physical signs that your parent might be struggling and may need assistance.
- **Are your parents still engaged in their usual social activities?** When you talk with your parents, ask how they're feeling and find out if they are still going to church services or meeting friends for coffee. Loss of interest in socializing or hobbies could be a sign of depression. It's also possible that there is an underlying physical health issue that is causing them to back away from the things they once enjoyed.
- **Have you noticed a major change in mood or outlook?** Does your parent go from happy to crying in seconds, or come across as more irritable and grumpy than normal? Do not ignore these signs. In fact, keep an eye out to see if they persist over a stretch of days or weeks. You might also check with friends and neighbors to see if they are noticing these behavior changes as well."

- **Does your loved one have difficulty getting up or standing?** See if their gait has changed or if they are using items to balance themselves as they walk from room to room. Take a close look in the bathroom at towel bars, window sills and shower curtains. If your senior is having trouble getting off the toilet they could have developed a several-step process of using one or more of these items for support.
- **Have you noticed that your parents are losing weight or have very little appetite?** Check the kitchen for junk food or items that are easy to prepare but are lacking in nutritional value. In either case, your parents could be putting themselves at risk of lacking proper nutrition that could lead to other more serious health issues.

These physical and emotional signs are all tough issues to face, but ignoring any of them could prove more dangerous and costly to your loved one.

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LOSS OF ATTENTION SIGNALS AND ENVIRONMENTAL CLUES

Now, let's look at behaviors that signal a lack or loss of attention:

- **Look at your parent's appearance.** Is clothing dirty or unkempt or is your loved one neglecting personal hygiene? If anything seems off, such as failure to keep up with daily good grooming habits, it could be a sign of depression, dementia or other health issues.
- **Check for diminished driving skills.** Warning signs include slow response times, rolling through stop signs, missing turns, or braking quickly to avoid rear-ending someone. While no one wants to see anyone lose this vital piece of independence, it's more worrisome and dangerous if driving skills are impaired due to physical ailments, a lack of attention and inability to focus. Not only is your loved one's life at risk, he or she is also putting the lives of others in danger.
- **Note signs that demonstrate difficulty concentrating or memory loss.** This may include a lack of interest in reading and missed appointments. Check for partially read books or magazines, or improper placement of items around the house. You may receive repeated phone calls at odd hours. Check for mishandled medications – carefully examine prescription bottles and check the refill date against the number of pills in the bottle. You can also call the pharmacy to check on the status of timely refills.
- **Watch for situations that indicate poor judgment.** This can come in the form of deciding against going to the doctor because your parent “just went last week”, even though it was an appointment with another doctor for a different health issue.

One more place to look for clues is in your loved one's living environment. Next time you go to visit, take a really close look around the home. Look for evidence of poor housekeeping and lack of home maintenance. These are sure signs that something isn't right. More specifically:

- **Check the refrigerator, freezer and drawers.** Make note if food has spoiled, or if there is nothing there because your parent can't go to the store. If things are really messy, that could be a sign of having difficulty cleaning tight, cluttered places.
- **Inspect the top of furniture and countertops.** Dishes piling up, dust and dirt are signs that household tasks are becoming more difficult and are therefore not getting done.
- **Look up to check fans and ceilings.** The inability to lift arms and climb stools may have prevented your loved one from cleaning soot and grime from high places.
- **Look down at floors and stairways.** See if shaky hands have spilled drinks and food, soiling vinyl, wood, carpet and walkways. Notice if frayed carpets, throw rugs, objects and furniture are creating tripping hazards. Check for clutter under beds and sofas – this may be a fire hazard.
- **Examine the mail.** Ensure that bills are being paid and correspondence being answered. If not, it could be a sign of something serious.

Any or all of these signs may cause frustration and concern. Most important, these clues point to the fact that something needs to be done to help your loved one remain independent.

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FEARS OF AGING, AND FRAILITY

For many aging adults, the biggest fear is loss of independence. The fear of not being able to care for themselves anymore is usually related to the second most worrisome fear, which is declining health. Other top ten fears are not being able to live at home, the inability to manage the activities of daily living, not being able to drive and fear of falling or getting hurt.

Seniors also fear also includes the death of a spouse or other family member, isolation or loneliness, and being cared for by a stranger. The other big fear is running out of money.

Declining health is a key concern. We've all seen seniors who seem so vibrant and healthy and then met others who appear to be so much older even though they might be younger in years. A term used to describe this latter group is *frail*.

Most of us know frailty when we see it – weakness, fatigue, reduced activity levels, and for some, weight loss. It is a condition that threatens the mind, body and social life of older adults.

Did you know...?

Seniors in both the U.S. and Canada say they worry about the future, and the number one fear is loss of independence.

Source: survey conducted for the Home Instead Senior Care network by the Boomer Project

In fact, fear of frailty is a major concern not only for seniors, but for those ages 35 to 62 – many of whom are daughters – worried about the health of their older loved ones.

In a women’s study released in 2009, researchers at Columbia and Johns Hopkins Universities discovered the important role activity plays in the fight against frailty and shed new light on what causes the condition.

Researchers found that frailty is the result of a systems failure in older adults, rather than a specific problem, disease, or even chronological age. Data from women ages 70 to 79 led researchers to discover that half of those fragile seniors had three or more systems at abnormal levels, compared with just 16% of the non-frail population. Some of the factors that were assessed included anemia, inflammation and fine motor skills.

Family members as well as professionals are playing a role in helping researchers define frailty. One study conducted in 2004 asked health care providers and family caregivers what they see when they think of frailty.

The results seemed to surprise the researchers. Dr. Stephanie Studenski, who serves as director of clinical research for the University of Pittsburgh Institute on Aging, said that she thought the thing that was most striking about the research was that many family members perceived that an older person is getting more or less frail based on social and psychological factors, whereas doctors focused on the physical evidence.

What Dr. Studenski concluded is that frailty should not just be defined in physical terms, but should include spirit, mood and attitude.

Even better, she said when it comes to frailty there is heartening news. Family caregivers who can encourage and integrate physical, mental and social activities in senior’s lives can help them ward off frailty and stay healthy.

Notes:

HELPING SENIORS STAY STRONG

The good news about aging is that keeping an older adult’s mind, body, and social life active can prevent or even reverse frailty. As a family caregiver, you are in a unique position to help your loved one figure out which activities will work best.

Exercise the mind. According to a study in the journal *Neurology*, activities that keep the brain active may delay the precipitous memory decline that defines dementia.

- Encourage your senior to partake in at least one activity a day that will exercise their mind, such as reading, writing, doing crossword puzzles or playing card games.
- The National Institute of Aging suggests several creative activities to keep seniors active. One example is a memory

Workbook: Caring for the Entire Senior



exercise known as “On Call”. If your parent has a telephone that is programmed with the numbers of family and friends, ask them attempt to recall all of the numbers in the telephone directory and make a list. A variation on this game is to ask your senior loved one to try to remember the ingredients and directions of a favorite recipe or rules of a favorite sport or card game.

- Another creative mind exercise is called “Change Direction”. If parent has a regular route through the grocery store or to the mailbox, ask them to try a different route. Research has revealed that such a technique exercises the brain. If your loved one can’t leave the house, suggest a variation in routine such as having afternoon tea instead of coffee in the morning or swapping regular times of reading and watching TV. Another option is to use the opposite hand to do tasks or even wearing a watch on the opposite wrist. The benefit of these activities is that it will help their brains re-think daily tasks.

Keep an active body. According to the National Institute on Aging, regular exercise and physical activity are important to the physical and mental health of almost everyone, including older adults. Being physically active can help your parents continue to do the things they enjoy and stay independent. Also, health experts recommend daily activities in order to reduce the risk of developing some diseases and disabilities.

- There are many ways to encourage your senior loved one to be active. If the senior’s physical condition allows brisk walking, raking leaves, or taking the stairs count as exercise and can be done almost any time, are free and don’t require special equipment. However, we recommend the senior consult with their doctor before engaging in brisk activity or an exercise regime.
- If you senior loved one is confined to a chair for much of the day, try to find ways to encourage movement in their daily life. One activity is called “Circle Scarves”. Find two colorful scarves, put one in each of your loved one’s hands and tell them to extend their hands straight out in front. Have them make circles in the air with the scarves, going from small to large circles, then back to small circles again. Add music or have them sing so they can go along with a beat.

Exercise the soul or social life. This is another important way to prevent frailty and fight the effects of aging. Nearly half of all seniors who responded to the Home Instead Senior Care survey said that staying spiritually engaged is a challenge. One way an older adult can do that, even if they are homebound, is by helping others.

- Encourage your senior to send letters and e-mails to those who might need a boost. “A Million Thanks” is a year-round campaign to show appreciation to our U.S. Military men and women, both past and present, for their sacrifices, dedication and service to our country through letters, e-mails, cards and prayers. Go to www.amillionthanks.org for more details.
- Try something relaxing, like creating an indoor garden. Container pots are easy and fun any time of year. For example, help your senior fill a clay pot with soil and then fill with their favorite herbs. They can make sure it gets water and sunshine and in a few weeks they’ll have fresh herbs to use in their favorite dishes.
- If your parents can get out, make sure they are having regular contact with others – be it a senior’s group or with those who share a common volunteer effort, hobby or faith.

These activities are just the start. Visit www.getmommoving.com for more ideas.

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