

# How to Support an Aging Relative or Friend

**W**e all have moments of forgetfulness or lose our balance from time to time. But as we get older, such instances may be a cause of concern.

If you have an aging family member or friend, it's helpful to be aware of certain signs that might indicate your loved one needs assistance.

## Signs Seniors May Need Help

Do you notice a decline in their ability to perform basic tasks like combing their hair, bathing, or brushing their teeth? Have they lost weight? Are they unable to properly maintain their home? These are generally early indicators that seniors may need extra help. Other changes in behavior you may notice:

- Instability or falls
- Forgetting to take medication
- Difficulty completing regular routines like picking up the mail or answering the phone
- Lapses in memory or repeatedly having the same conversation
- Losing track of appointments
- Frequently getting lost or disoriented

Sometimes physical ailments can cause these changes to take place. If possible, encourage, or even accompany, your loved one to see a physician to make sure these symptoms aren't caused by an acute illness that can be reversed.

## How to Help Seniors Deal with Aging Concerns

There are lots of ways to support loved ones as they age. For starters, be willing to discuss the aging process with them. Chances are they may be frightened of losing their independence. Having an open, supportive conversation will show them you respect their wishes and help you understand what those wishes are.

Many seniors struggle with depression and grief. Isolation can intensify these feelings. Maintaining a strong social network and staying active are extremely beneficial. Help connect them with local resources and activities like:

- Group fitness, art or adult education classes
- Gaming activities like bridge clubs
- Support programs for grief, memory issues, Parkinson's disease, and more
- Retirement communities
- Senior centers and churches
- Regional health departments
- Volunteer or charitable organizations they can participate in or benefit from

Such activities can help them navigate certain changes that occur with age. Plus, focusing on new opportunities can make them feel empowered, connected and vibrant.

Most importantly, you want to ensure they are safe. If you notice changes in behavior that you feel threaten their wellbeing, it's time to get more structured help in place.

*As seniors age, it's common for them to grieve losing the ability to do certain things they once enjoyed. Help them focus on the things they can do, rather than the things they are no longer able to do, by finding new ways to enjoy similar activities.*

## Next Steps

If your senior needs outside help, there are three options:

- Provide care yourself, or split caregiving among family and friends
- Hire someone to help, such as a home health care provider
- Find a retirement community where your loved one can get ongoing or interim care

Determining which option best suits the situation will depend on a variety of factors from your loved one's health condition to available resources. However, each option has ways to help seniors maintain their independence and enjoy a fulfilling quality of life.

