Tips for living well while caring for a loved one.

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Changing Health Care for Good®
The tips within this guide are intended to help you be proactive in coping with the common changes that occur in the aging process to ensure the best quality of life for you and your loved one.

Introducing the 5 F’s —
Your keys to success as the caregiver of a loved one.

Consider these five areas of your life as the keys to achieving balance in your role as a caregiver.

**Faith**
No matter what your spiritual beliefs may be, prayer, meditation or anything that allows you to feel part of something greater will help you find balance.

**Fitness**
Being fit is about more than physical fitness; you want to factor in emotional, psychological and fitness of attitude! Preserving your total health enables you to make the most of life.

**Family**
Family is the foundation to a happy life because your family is there to share in your success and support you in your trials. Some good rules to live by are:

- Put your family first — before a job or any other business.
- Make sure your family knows you care about them by being there at the right moments.
- Keep in mind that the choices and decisions you make in life affect a lot of people, your family first and foremost.

**Friends**
Friends are also important to the formula for a balanced life. Friends can help balance your perspective, share common interests and bring humor to your life.

**Finances**
Finances can be a challenge. Remember, though, money is a means to an end, so keep things in perspective. Money is not everything.
Age = Change

As people get older, their bodies begin to change. Here are a few “golden rules” to help you as a caregiver in dealing with these common changes:

- Hearing loss
- Memory loss
- Taste and smell loss
- Visual changes
- Changes in sensation
- Functional changes

Hearing Loss

Approximately a third of older adults experience hearing loss to some degree.

**Common signs of hearing loss include:**

- Lip reading
- Nodding
- Behavior changes, such as being less engaged or distracted
- Complaints that you are mumbling

**As a caregiver, what can you do about hearing loss?**

- Reduce background noise as much as possible when speaking
- Face the individual and make eye contact
- Use lower-pitched voices, speak slowly and do not shout
- Pause at the end of phrases or ideas
- Stand 2-3 feet away from the person when speaking
- Rephrase statements rather than repeat
- Have the listener repeat what he/she has heard

Memory Loss

The speed at which our minds work slows down as we age. It is not normal when it begins to interfere with activities of daily living and the ability to think, remember and understand.

**Possible causes of memory loss:**

- Dementia
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Stress
- Medications
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Stroke
Early Signs of Memory Loss

Recent memory loss – Forgets to do tasks such as paying bills, going to doctor appointments or remembering where items are stored.

Slight confusion – Begins getting lost easily, exhibits changes in personality or has difficulty staying engaged.

Poor judgment – Needs help with making decisions and performing tasks of daily living.

What can you do about memory loss?
• Be non-judgmental and non-argumentative
• Be patient
• Encourage regular routines
• Make instructions simple and easy to follow
• Use cueing for instructions
• Use assistive tools, such as an eyeglass holder, and prepare to-do lists
• Pay attention to non-verbal communication
• Schedule a geriatric assessment to more fully address medication issues and anxiety

Taste, Smell and Nutrition — Appetite Loss

Two thirds of our taste sensations depend on our ability to smell. In fact, the inability to smell is the most common symptom to a decrease in appetite.

Many factors can alter our sense of taste and smell:
• History of smoking
• Poor dental hygiene, loss of teeth, poor fitting dentures
• Nasal congestion

Factors that affect our nutrition:
• Vision problems
• Medications
• Difficulty swallowing
• Inability to cook
• Decline in mental status
• Social isolation
What can you do about loss of appetite, taste or smell?

- Serve foods that look good — people eat first with their eyes and noses
- Avoid packaged foods that are difficult to open
- Use herbs and seasonings to add flavor
- Place foods on the plate that include high-contrasting colors
- Serve manageable portions
- Visit a dentist at least annually

Visual Changes

As people age, the ability for their eyes to accommodate changes in light is reduced. By age 45, many adults need magnification to see fine details.

Discriminating between colors can become difficult due to the eyes’ lenses becoming yellow. Soft contrasting colors are hard to read. Depth perception is also affected.

What you can do to help overcome vision changes:

- Use bright non-skid tape on stairs
- Reduce glare as much as possible
- Use nightlights around the house
- Increase the overall environmental lighting
- Avoid fancy fonts and italics in type
- Standard or bold type font is preferred
- Encourage the use of visual aides
- Visit the eye doctor at least annually

Changes in Sensation

Age causes difficulties in activities of daily living such as opening packaged items because nerves, muscles and joints are changing over time. In addition, skin may be more sensitive to sunlight, cold or dry conditions.

What you can do to help overcome changes in sensation:

- Use age-friendly items, such as large-handled items, Velcro and zippers
- Dress appropriately for the weather
- Use skin moisturizer
- Use caution when out in the sun
- Use oven mitts when cooking
- Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate!
Functional Changes

People often find that the older they get, the harder it is to get around. Because their muscles lose elasticity and lubrication around joints decreases, people can start walking less due to fear of falling.

- Our stance becomes wider and we take shorter steps
- Balance problems from disease can lead to gait disturbances

**Perform a home safety check to identify hazards which may cause falls, such as:**

- Poor lighting
- Use of throw rugs
- Lack of bathroom grab bars
- Clutter
- Cracks in the sidewalks
- Electrical cords in pathways

**Encourage your loved one to:**

- Exercise regularly to strengthen muscles
- Stay active and involved
- Use assistive devices, such as walkers, canes and proper footwear
- Have regular vision and hearing screenings
- Schedule a geriatric assessment to assess functional changes including gait and balance
Medication Safety

• Older adults 65+ tend to take more medicines than any other age group.
• Many medications have side effects that can make certain conditions feel worse.
• Taking multiple medications can lead to increased risk of interactions.

It’s important to take medicine the right way — each day.

Gather information about the medicines your loved one takes:

• What is the name of the medicine and what is it for?
• How often is he/she supposed to take it?
• When should he/she stop taking it?
• Should it be taken with or without food?
• What are the potential side effects?
• Tell the doctor or pharmacist if your loved one has difficulty swallowing.
• Ensure that you do not have a hard time opening the bottle/container.
• Make sure you can read the label and understand the directions.
• Make a list of ALL their medications (prescription, over the counter and supplements) and keep it up to date.
Talking with the doctor

Before going to your loved one’s appointment, make a list of your concerns and prioritize them (e.g., new symptoms, shots and vaccines).

• Have your loved one take information with him/her, including hospitalizations and tests done by their specialist(s), the medication list, list of all doctors and recent test results.
• Make sure your loved one brings his/her glasses and hearing aides.
• Plan to update the doctor about what has happened since the last visit.
• Encourage your loved one to be open about how they have been feeling.
• Ask questions about medical tests:
  – Why are they being done?
  – What steps does the test involve?
  – What are the risks involved?
  – How will we find out the results and how long will it be?
• Stay involved in your loved one’s care:
  – Ask about different treatments.
  – Discuss choices and alternatives.
  – Consider your loved one’s values and goals.
  – Ask about prevention.
• What can be done to keep the condition from getting worse?
• How will making a change in lifestyle help?
• Are there support groups or community services to help?

Planning ahead

You shouldn’t wait until your loved one gets sick or get older to put their affairs in order — the sooner, the better.

The idea is that you and your loved one are planning for the future, which can make all the difference in an emergency or unexpected accident.

Knowing what decisions your loved one would want you to make on their behalf takes some of the burden off and ensures their wishes are respected.
Common legal documents

A **Living Will** is a written document that tells the healthcare team how a person wishes to be cared for near the end of life.

**Durable Power of Attorney** is a document that names a person to make medical decisions for you, if you are unable to do so.

**Healthcare Surrogate** is the person who is designated to make medical decisions for you at times when you may not be able to.

**What to do:**

- Put important documents and copies of legal documents in one place.
- Ensure that the surrogate or power of attorney has a copy of legal documents, and a trusted family member or friend knows where the documents are located.
- Check each year to see if there is anything new to add or change.

We can help

**Baptist AgeWell Institute** is an innovative approach to addressing the unique needs of older adults, designed to help people maintain functionality and independence. Programs encompass outpatient care, a specialized emergency center at Baptist Medical Center Jacksonville, eldercare advocacy to ensure a smooth transition from hospital to home, and education and training to support caregivers in their important role.

**Baptist AgeWell Center for Senior Health** is a specialized outpatient clinic located across from Baptist Medical Center Jacksonville. Fellowship-trained geriatricians lead a multi-disciplinary team to provide comprehensive geriatric assessments that evaluate all the physical, emotional, social and environmental factors that can affect quality of life. For individuals 65 and older with an unexplained decline or other complex health needs, we address a host of issues, including strength and balance, incontinence, memory loss, depression, anxiety and more.

For more information or to arrange for a geriatric assessment for your loved one, call 904.202.4AGE (4243)
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For more information:
Please visit baptistjax.com/agewell
Or call Senior Services at Baptist Health at 904.202.4AGE (4243)