



Family Caregiver Tips

Home Medication Management

Here are some tips to decrease the chance of medication errors and interactions.

- Use the same pharmacy for all you loved one's medications so the pharmacist can check for interactions.
- Keep an updated list of all medications which includes the dose and the reason for taking the medication. Keep a copy at home in case it is needed in an emergency.
- Take the current list of medications to all doctors' appointments including any specialists.
- If you loved one is prescribed a new medication, ask the doctor if there is any medication that could be discontinued.
- Throw away any old medications or any over the counter medications that are not needed.

Advocacy

It is the responsibility of the primary family caregiver to act as an advocate for their loved one. In the role of advocate, the primary family caregiver must voice any concerns about the quality of care being received in the facility or at home. Questions or concerns should be addressed using the appropriate chain of command. Do not be afraid to move up the chain of command if your concerns are not being addressed at a lower level. If at any time an issue is not resolved in a timely manner or to your satisfaction, please call us for assistance.

Remember, staff generally responds better when they are given both POSITIVE and NEGATIVE feedback rather than just hearing the negative. Additionally, a friendly word and/or a plate of cookies can go a long way in obtaining loyalty

from your loved one's caregivers in a facility or at home.

Please call our office if there is any significant change in your loved one's status or if there is an admission to the hospital.

Caregiver Stress:

The caregivers need to take care of themselves. Caregivers that are sick themselves do their loved one little good. Caregivers can be prone to illness if they are not getting enough sleep or exercise or if they are constantly feeling stressed. Caregivers should make it a priority to make time in their day for self-care activities. Try to get the proper amount of sleep, exercise regularly, eat a well-balanced diet and try to reduce your stress. Ask for help if you are not able to balance caregiving and self-care activities. Joining a caregiver's support group may help in dealing with the stress. If it is not possible to go out to a group, consider joining a group online. We can recommend some options in your area.

Urinary Tract Infections

Urinary Tract Infections (UTI) tend to be very common in older adults. They can be caused by many factors, but often are due to bowel or bladder incontinence, poor hygiene, lack of mobility and underlying medical issues. It is important to know that the elderly may have unique symptoms due to a UTI and the caregiver can become familiar with what to expect. Symptoms can include but are not limited to; increased confusion, increased falls, dark or foul-smelling urine, fever, or pain and burning with urination.

The good news is, urinary tract Infections can be preventable and treatable. If you think your loved

one has a UTI, it is important to call their primary doctor so they can take a urine sample and test for bacteria. If they feel UTIs are becoming chronic, they may refer to a urologist. UTIs are often treated with oral antibiotics, but it is important to know that doctors will not treat bacteria in the urine with a lack of symptoms, as many older adults chronically have bacteria in their urine that does not pose a risk to their health. Overuse of antibiotics can be harmful, so your doctor will decide when it is appropriate to treat.

To prevent a urinary tract infection, make sure your loved one is well hydrated. Change soiled incontinence products frequently and keep the area clean and dry. When in doubt, call your healthcare provider.

Geriatricians

Geriatricians are medical doctors who are board certified in either family practice or internal medicine and who have undertaken additional specialized training. Geriatrics is a branch of medicine that focuses on the care of older adults, much like a pediatrician focuses on the care children and adolescents. Geriatricians' special training enables them to better assess and treat the often multiple chronic medical and social issues that older adults are dealing with. Geriatricians are trained to look at a person holistically, taking into consideration the unique social and environmental circumstances that may be affecting their health. Conversely, they also look at how a person's medical conditions may be affecting their ability to live independently and may be affecting those who are providing care and support.

It is recommended that a geriatrician be consulted in the following circumstances:

- A person's conditions cause considerable impairment and frailty. An example is a person over 65 who is coping with several medical conditions and is having cognitive problems such as increasing forgetfulness.
- Multiple prescriptions make it unclear what drugs are appropriate and/or necessary.
- Family members or friends are feeling increasingly strained in their role as caregiver.

Geriatricians can act as consultants or can act as

a primary care physician. For additional information about geriatricians or for information about finding a geriatrician in your area, please call our office.

Medicare.gov is a great website to search for providers. Once you go to the link below, put in your zip code, provider type (doctors and clinicians) and specialty (geriatric medicine). This will give you a list of local doctors that specialize in geriatrics.

<https://www.medicare.gov/care-compare/>

Depression

Depression is not a "normal sign of aging" and should be addressed and treated as seriously as any other medical condition. As a person ages, depression is often overlooked and as a result, goes untreated. Symptoms can appear as increased tiredness, grumpiness or irritability. Depression sometimes causes confusion, lack of motivation and difficulty concentrating that can seem like symptoms of Alzheimer's disease or other brain disorders. Mood changes can be a side effect of some medications prescribed for other chronic medical conditions such as high blood pressure or heart disease.

Depression has many causes. It may be a result of dealing with losses associated with aging such as deaths of family members or friends, loss of one's abilities or loss of independence. It might be a result of a major change such as a move or retirement. As a person ages, it is common to review one's life to come to terms with earlier life events. Some people need help navigating events or regrets that they may have experienced. Caregivers can also become depressed, because of the stresses and demands required of them. Sometimes depression has no known cause- it just is.

The following are symptoms of depression. If you have several of these and they last for more than 2 weeks, see a doctor and ask whether you might be depressed.

- Feeling empty inside, having ongoing sadness and/or anxiety
- Tiredness or a lack of energy
- Loss of pleasure in activities that used to be pleasurable



- Sleep problems- sleeping too much, or too little, including frequent waking or early waking without being able to go back to sleep
- Eating more or less than usual
- Frequent crying
- Aches and pains that do not go away with treatment
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering and/or making decisions
- Feeling worthless, guilty or hopeless
- Irritability
- Thoughts of death or suicide

Treatment for depression might include medication and/or talk therapy. Your doctor can help you find additional resources or a referral to a therapist or geriatric psychiatrist if needed. If you have any questions or would like more information or resources, call us.

For more information about depression in older adults, visit the following web sites:

