

# Caring For Your Aged Care Loved One



healthcare<sup>2</sup>you group

 eyecare	 physio	 podiatry	 nutrition
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# Preventing Falls



Knowing the risk factors and taking a few precautions is essential in minimising injuries. If your loved one has had a fall in the past six months, their chances of falling may be increased.

## Precautions:

- Marking the edges of steps so they are easy to use
- Ensuring clothing is not too long and causing a trip hazard
- Make sure there is adequate lighting, especially at night
- Installing grab rails in places such as bathrooms
- Regular exercise to prevent muscle weakness and joints stiffening
- Wearing the right shoes that are comfortable, firm-fitting. Flat shoes with a low wide heel, laces, buckles or Velcro fastenings and rubber soles that grip



# Who Can Help?

Don't dismiss a fall, talk to one of the below health professionals and ask about different options that may help your loved one:

**Doctor** - The Doctor can assess and help manage your loved one's health, review medicines and they may also refer them to another health professional or service.

**Podiatrist** - Painful or swollen feet, tingling, pins and needles or bunions are all things that can affect balance. A podiatrist may suggest ways to improve circulation and decrease any swelling in the legs and feet and provide advice on suitable footwear.

**Occupational Therapist** - The environment will be assessed for potential hazards and they can help with modifications to make the environment safer, such as rails in the bathroom and providing an exercise program.



**Physiotherapist** - They may be able to help with balance and strengthening exercises. It's important that any equipment used is adjusted to meet your loved one's needs. For example, a physiotherapist can help make sure that the walking frame is the correct height and teach them how to use it safely.

**Optometrist** - Your eyes not only help you to see but also to maintain balance. Having your loved one's eyes checked regularly, making sure they are wearing glasses with the right prescription and keeping their glasses clean are important.



# Fighting Guilt

Guilt is a common feeling in the landscape of care giving. It's your body's way of saying, 'Pay attention.' Just like the pain a burned finger pulls your hand from a stove, so, too, guilt guides your actions.



## The Ideal You

Guilt often arises when there's a mismatch between your choices and the choices the 'Ideal You' would have made.

A mother may ask herself, "How can I go out for a walk with my kids when my mother is at a facility?" (A hint for this mother: she can give more to her mother with an open heart when she takes good care of herself.)

You may have feelings misaligned with the 'Ideal You'. Feeling angry about the injustice of your loved one's illness? You might even feel angry at your loved one for getting sick. Recognising those feelings can produce a healthy dose of guilt. Yes, you may even feel guilty about feeling guilty.

As you look to the future, you can create and reinvent the vision of the 'Ideal You'. What legacy do you want to leave? What values do you hold dear?

Let this reinvented 'Ideal You' make those moment-to-moment choices that create your legacy.



## Tips to help manage guilt:

- ✓ Recognise the feeling of guilt. Unrecognised guilt eats at your soul.
- ✓ Identify other feelings. Often, there are feelings under the feeling of guilt. Once you put it into words, you will have a new perspective.
- ✓ There's no one way you should feel. Give yourself permission to have any feeling and recognise that your feelings don't control your actions and then your guilt will subside.
- ✓ Look for the cause of the guilt. What is the mismatch between this "Ideal You" and the real you? Do you need to change your actions so that they align with your values?
- ✓ Meet your needs. Needs are not bad or good; they just are. If you need some time alone, find someone to be with your loved one.
- ✓ Change your behaviour to fit your values. For example, Clara felt guilty because her friend was in the hospital and she didn't send a card. Her guilt propelled her to buy some beautiful blank cards to make it easier for her to drop a note the next time.

Understand that you will be more effective when you care for yourself first. When you care for yourself, you increase and improve your own caring. Yes, guilt is part of caring for a loved one, but this guilt can help you become the person you and your loved one want you to be.

# ✓ Adjusting to Living in an Aged Care Facility

**Moving into an aged care facility is a major life transition. Understanding the common responses to change can be helpful in addressing stress and confusion.**

## **Anxiety around the unknown**

We all want to know what will happen now and in the future, as it provides a sense of security. Think about what helped your loved one cope with previous transitions and challenges and how these can help you to deal with current challenges. For example, a positive attitude, family and friends or sense of humour. Typically, things become more stable and a person's confidence improves as they gain experience and familiarity with the new situation.

## **Questioning**

You or your loved one may question if you have made the right choice. This uncertainty usually decreases with time but if not, it may mean someone is struggling to adjust and needs some additional support.

## **Time**

For most people, the first four weeks after moving into an aged care facility tend to be the most challenging. Adapting to change takes time and it's normal to need 6 to 12 months to fully adjust. Initial feelings of helplessness often cause residents to experience confusion and a depressed mood. If these feelings continue once the older person is settled in and any initial problems are resolved, it's important to assist them in receiving further help.



Keep in mind that while change is a normal part of life, how we think about it has a major impact on how we experience and respond to new situations.

How well and quickly your loved one adapts to residential care will depend on their experience of the transition, their health, their relationship with staff, support from family and friends and a willingness to find positivity and acceptance in the situation.



# The Importance of Nutrition

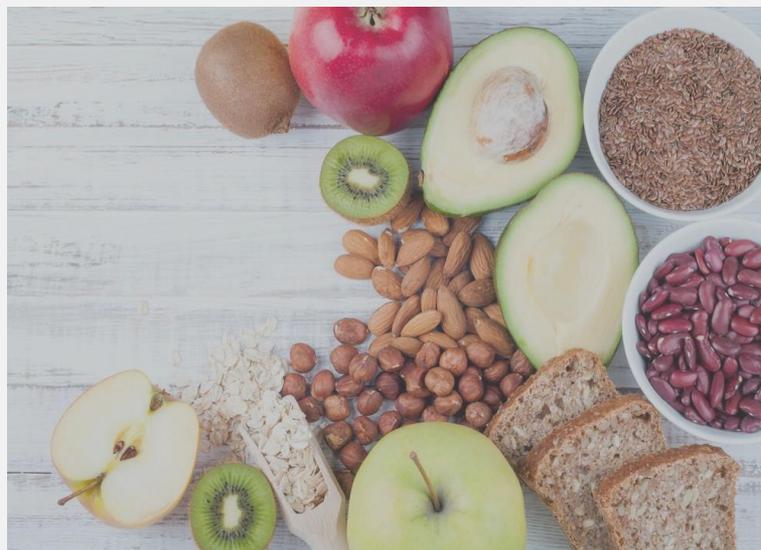
Even though the aged body isn't the same as it used to be, proper care and the right nutrients can help the elderly enjoy a healthy and long life. The information below will help your loved one to lead a healthy life.

Water in the body decreases with age, so your loved one will become dehydrated very easily. Sometimes they won't even feel thirsty. It's recommended that they drink at least 30 grams of water for every 100 grams of weight.



For the elderly, iron deficiency can be seen in those who aren't eating much. Good sources for iron include lean red meats or breakfast cereals.

Zinc deficiency has been reported to negatively affect immunity and increase the likelihood of infectious diseases. Meat, poultry, fish, beans, chia seeds, almonds, pecans and oatmeal should be a part of your loved one's diet to help meet the requirements for zinc.



Calcium is one ingredient that most elderly aren't getting enough of. Most will avoid it as they believe that milk upsets their stomach. Non fat powdered milk can be used in recipes as a substitute for milk. Other foods such as yogurt, low fat cheese and broccoli can also help meet requirements for calcium.

Protein is needed to support a healthy immune system and prevent the wasting of muscle. Since energy needs are less, the elderly should eat high quality protein such as eggs, lean meats, poultry and fish.



Fat intake for the elderly should be limited, not eliminated. You can limit fat by choosing lean meats, low fat dairy products and food preparation methods that don't include frying.

# Sleeping Problems with the Elderly

Sleeping problems in the elderly are more than likely to manifest in a particular pattern, depending on the health of the person and the prescription drugs they may be taking for their health problems. The quality of their sleep may change considerably, either because of less demands on their energy as a result of retirement or through illness.

Illness disrupts sleep patterns in the elderly and may result in increased awakenings due to physical discomfort. Urinary urgency, cramps, angina, chronic obstructive airways disease and left ventricular failure may be some of the many illnesses which cause sleep problems in the elderly.

An elderly person may become very anxious about a change in their sleep pattern. However, it will be necessary to thoroughly investigate the problem in order to ascertain if this perceived sleeping problem causes dysfunction in their waking activities.



## Why else might my loved one face sleeping difficulty?

- They may spend some hours in bed before sleep occurs
- Possibly reduced daytime activity
- Daytime naps
- The pressure of a normal working day has been taken away, so the energy output is considerably less.



# So how can sleep problems in the elderly be resolved?

- ✓ A warm comfortable noise free environment
- ✓ Regular exercise
- ✓ Good diet with no heavy meals at night and no eating late at night
- ✓ Relaxation therapies such as Aromatherapy
- ✓ Plan all activities during the day



Milk, particularly low fat milk, wakes us up. Milk delivers tyrosine to the brain, which in turn triggers production of dopamine and norepinephrine, stimulating us to think more quickly and accurately.

## Excessive Sleep in the Elderly

Excessive sleep is the sign of a problem just as much as not getting enough sleep. A condition called hypersomnia is when someone sleeps too much during the day. People with this condition may sleep all-night long and still feel sleepy throughout the day, taking long naps to combat their fatigue.

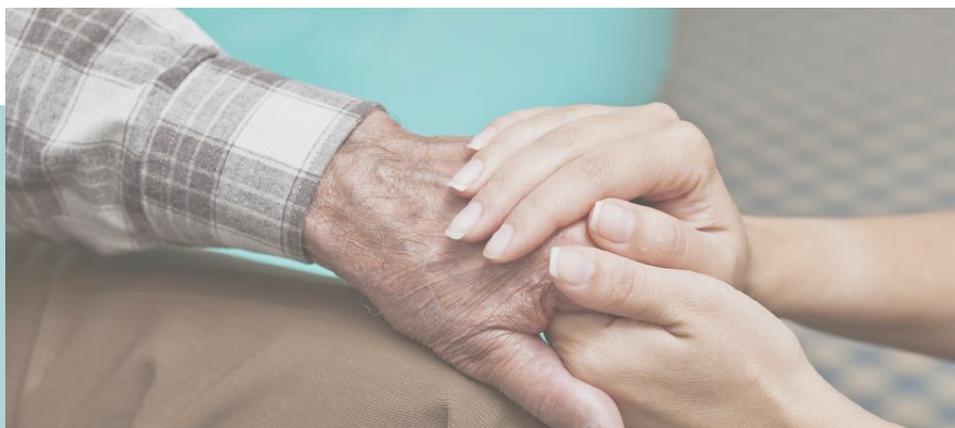
A doctor can test for this condition and determine what type of hypersomnia they may have. This will help figure out the proper treatment. Behavioural therapy and sometimes prescription medicines are used to treat excessive sleepiness.

# Helping your Loved One Deal with Grief and Loss

At some point in our lives, we've experienced what it is like to grieve the loss of someone that we love and cherish. This can be devastating for the elderly and especially if they don't get the help that they need to cope with their grief. It's highly possible for them to become depressed and a study has shown that 10 to 15 percent of Australians over the age of 65 are already suffering from depression.



In order to help our elderly loved ones from spiralling into depression, we must find ways to help them cope with grief and loss in positive ways.



## Signs Of Grief In The Elderly

Many older adults may not outwardly show signs of grieving but carers and relatives should be on the lookout for physical and emotional distress. Grief can manifest in crying or even a reluctance to cry and a change in eating habits can also be a sign of distress. Losing interest in family, friends and hobbies is another indicator of grieving as well as having difficulty in sleeping, concentrating and making decisions. If your elderly loved one is experiencing any of the above, here are some ways to help cope with grief and loss

## Let Them Express Their Grief

Let your elderly relative or friend know that it is alright to mourn. Don't offer to fix things or make things better—at a time like this, the best thing that anyone can do is just be there and listen. Offer your support and keep in mind that a touch or a hug can do more to help your grieving loved one than any words.

## Visit Regularly

Whether your elderly loved one is living at home or in an assisted care facility, it's important to make time to visit on a regular basis. Your visits will provide something to look forward to and will prevent the feeling of isolation. Keep your loved one updated on positive things that have been going on in the world and bring something that they may like, such as a basket of favourite food or baked goods.

## Make Them Feel Secure

Grieving older adults need to feel secure during this difficult time and will need the love and acceptance of family and friends. Don't be critical if they need to escape briefly from grief—nobody can grieve all the time and they may need to do something for themselves to feel good, even just for a while. So if they want to go out and head to the shops or go for a nice walk, offer to be with them if they want company.



Helping your elderly relative or friend cope with loss is a process and it may take some time before they can heal. But your love and support can help during this difficult time, so be there for your loved one as they try to cope with grief.

