

Senior Sense

Inside this issue:

- **Should a Parent Move Into Your Home?**
- **Finding a New Health Care Provider**
- **Protect Yourself from Carbon Monoxide**

Your Relationships

Should A Parent Move Into Your Home?

You visited your mother for the holidays and found her refrigerator nearly empty, her checkbook misplaced and her finances in complete disarray. Or, your father has neglected to take his diabetes medications, nearly putting him into a coma. When adult children face these situations, the question soon arises, “How can I support my parent’s independence while trying to keep her safe?”

Most communities now offer a variety of senior care options based on the amount of support that the senior may need. These vary from services that are provided in the senior’s own home, such as housecleaning help, all the way to 24-hour care in a residential skilled nursing facility. For many families, the decision about whether a parent should move in with an adult

child is somewhere on that continuum.

Some families feel an obligation to invite a parent into their home when caregiving needs increase. The families believe this is the “right” or “best” thing to do, regardless of other options. In fact, depending on individual circumstances, there may be other caregiving options available that would provide better quality of care. And some adult children just assume that Mom would prefer to move in with them, but Mom may have very different ideas!

Should your parent move in with you when her abilities decline? The answer differs for every family, but here are some considerations:

- **Initiate open discussions.** Open and honest discussions with your parent and other family members is the essential first step when you are trying to decide whether relocating your



parent is the right thing to do. Family meetings with your parent, partner, children, siblings, and other key people will help everyone share their views and will help you decide how best to proceed. In this process, talk about all possible residential options, each person's role in the transition, the type of care to be provided, changes in lifestyle, finances, and the physical setting of the new home. Some families invite an outside person to facilitate these discussions. Many Geriatric Care Managers can do this or recommend someone with these skills. Your local Area Agency on Aging may also be a resource.

- **Assess the level of care needed.** As your parent gets older, his care needs will likely change. If your parent lives with you, be realistic about what you will and will not be able to do. Develop a strategy for getting additional help. Evaluate whether your parent needs constant assistance throughout the day. Determine which activities of daily living (eating, bathing, and toileting) your parent can handle himself, and your comfort level for providing personal care such as bathing or changing an adult diaper. Evaluate your own health and physical abilities.

- **Anticipate different family dynamics.** Whenever a new person

“Anticipate different family dynamics.”

joins a household, the routines and relationships change. You and your dad probably love each other dearly, but that doesn't mean you won't have some misunderstandings or disagreements if he moves in. Issues that you may have not thought about since childhood may erupt. You and your parent may need to re-negotiate who will be responsible for what kinds of decisions. Be honest with yourself and do not allow unresolved conflicts or obligations to create more pressure than you can manage.

Remember that not only is your relationship with your parent changing, but your relationship with others in

your household, and your grown siblings, will also change.

- **Consider various living arrangements.** Moving your parent into your home is

one option, but you and your family should take some time to consider other living arrangements as well. The type of housing and living arrangement will largely depend on your parent's care needs, finances, and available options. All family members, including the parent, need to discuss, understand, and accept the benefits and drawbacks of various living arrangements. Even if the decision is that living with an adult child is best, consider whether Mom might stay with your siblings periodically too.

You can anticipate that there will likely be challenges in your day-to-day



Senior Sense

relationship with a live-in parent. For example, you may need to be prepared for making decisions about Dad's daily routine – decisions that he is accustomed to making for himself. A parent can show his resistance to losing independence in some pretty creative ways. If you find yourself with hurt feelings or resentments, bring them up in calm, caring discussions with your parent. If your parent is too impaired for such discussions, find help for yourself from others – friends, therapists, pastors, or extended family members.

Sooner or later, the financial issues of caregiving must be discussed. For many families, these discussions can become very emotional. Disagreements over money can mask other lingering relationship issues. Again, this may be a time to involve an impartial third party such as a therapist and/or financial advisor.

Despite the challenges, providing support and care for your parent in your home can be a very rewarding experience. Your parent can contribute to the family through sharing her past and can become an integral part of your household. Multi-generational households can have many strengths.

Finally, remember that you can provide important caregiving for a parent even if

she does not live in your home.

Adapted from National Center on Caregiving, 2003.

“A parent can show his resistance to losing independence in some pretty creative ways.”

Your Health

Finding a New Health Care Provider

Many of us have the same doctors for many years. But sometimes we need to choose a new health care provider

because we move, they retire, we are unhappy with our care or we just need a specialist for a new condition. To make this change less stressful, here are some ideas to consider from the National Institutes on Aging:

- **Don't be afraid to change health care providers.** Doctors and other health professionals see many people every day. They realize they cannot meet everyone's needs. Do not stay with someone because you worry about hurting his or her feelings.
- **Know what you are looking for in a health care provider.** Do you prefer a male or female? Do they need to be associated with a certain medical center? Are evening appointments important? Do you prefer a group practice? Make a



list and decide which qualities are the most important to you.

- **Identify possible choices.** Once you know what you are looking for, ask people you know and trust for names of health care providers with whom they have had a good experience. If a

person's name comes up often, that is a good one to consider. Make sure this person is someone you can visit with your health

plan or insurance. Some policies may not allow you to use any doctor or health professional you want. Some health care providers do not see Medicare patients or only take a limited number.

- **Consult other sources.** The library may have reference books called *The Directory of Physicians in the United States* and *The Official American Board of Medical Specialties Directory of Board Certified Medical Specialists*. The American Medical Association also has a "doctor finder" on their Web site. These resources will not recommend a specific doctor, but they can tell you which ones are in your area. The state medical society can also tell you if complaints have been filed against a doctor you are considering.

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- **Learn more about the health care provider.** Call their office and talk to their staff about the health care provider's education and qualifications, the office policies and payment procedures. Notice how the staff treats you. You will interact with these people often.

- **Make an appointment to talk to the health care provider.** This is a way to learn about them and for

them to learn about you. You will be charged for this visit, but it will save you time and money in the long run. If you are not comfortable afterward, visit another candidate.

Here are some important questions to ask during the visit:

- Do you have many older patients?
- How do you feel about involving family members in decisions?
- Can I call or email you or your staff when I have questions? Will I be charged for telephone or email time?
- What do you think about complementary or alternative treatments like herbal medicines, acupuncture or massage?

After your visit, evaluate how you and the health care provider communicated.



Senior Sense

- Did the health care provider and staff give you a chance to ask questions?
 - Did they really listen?
 - Could you really understand them?
- Were you comfortable asking them to repeat things if needed?

Once you make your choice, be sure to arrange for your medical records to be transferred. Also take a complete list of all your medications and supplements. In fact, take along the actual containers of the drugs and supplements in a bag to your first check-up. Don't forget over-the-counter drugs as well like pain relievers or allergy medicines.

Call of the Wild Rice

This is an excellent rice dish for a special occasion. You may be able to find a package of wild rice and brown rice already mixed together. Do not get the boxes of rice mixtures that have flavor packets. These are too high in sodium.

½ cup wild rice

½ cup long grain brown rice

2 cups reduced sodium, fat free beef broth

½ cup dried cranberries (Craisins™)

½ cup chopped almonds

- 1) Mix all the ingredients together in a small covered saucepan. Bring to a boil and then turn down to simmer for approximately 50 minutes.

“Carbon monoxide (CO) is often called the silent killer because it is an invisible, odorless and tasteless gas that kills hundreds of people each year.

- 2) Remove from the heat and stir. Let stand covered for 20 more minutes.
- 3) Great served with beef, pork, poultry or fish. Also good with cooked dried beans and peas.

Makes 6 servings.

Nutritional Information:

Calories: 183

Carbohydrate: 32 grams

Protein: 5 grams

Fat: 4 grams

Sodium: 132 milligrams

Saturated Fat: less than 0.5 grams

Cholesterol: 0 milligrams

Fiber: 3 grams

Your Resources

Protect Yourself from Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide (CO) is often called the silent killer because it is an invisible, odorless and tasteless gas that kills hundreds of people each year. In most cases, these deaths could have been prevented.



College of Family and Consumer Sciences

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CO is produced by burning fuels such as gas, kerosene, charcoal and wood. High levels of CO occur in your home when appliances and heat sources are used incorrectly or poorly maintained. Low levels of exposure can result in shortness of breath, mild nausea and mild headaches. Exposure to higher concentrations results in severe headaches, dizziness, mental confusion, nausea and faintness that individuals often associate with the flu. Prolonged exposure to CO can result in death.

The US Environmental Protection Agency provides several helpful tips on how you can prevent CO poisoning.

- DO have all fuel-burning appliances including furnaces, gas appliances, space heaters, fireplaces and wood stoves inspected annually.
- DO vent fumes to the outside.
- DO avoid using unvented gas or kerosene space heaters. If you must use one, ALWAYS leave a window open for ventilation.
- DO check all exhaust ventilation systems, including chimneys, flues and vents annually.
- DO install a CO detector in your home, preferably near the bedroom. Choose a system with a battery backup

and replace the batteries annually. Since CO is lighter than air, you should place the CO detector about 5 feet

above the floor.

- DO NOT burn charcoal inside the house,

including in the fireplace and garage.

- DO NOT use gas or kerosene heaters that are not vented in enclosed spaces, especially in bedrooms.
- DO NOT leave a running automobile in the garage even with the garage door open.
- DO NOT ignore the symptoms of CO poisoning.

If you suspect high levels of CO in your home, open the doors and windows, turn off all gas appliances and go outside. If the exposure is severe, go to an emergency room or call 911.

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Dear Friend,

SENIOR SENSE is a quarterly publication provided by your local county Cooperative Extension office. It is prepared by Extension Family & Consumer Sciences specialists at The University of Georgia specifically for the educational needs of older Georgians. Please contact your local Cooperative Extension office for more information on these and related topics.

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Learning for Life

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