

THE MESSENGER

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Family Members Are an Important Part of a Skilled Nursing Facility Resident's Care Team

The decision to move an elderly parent into a skilled nursing facility is often a difficult one for family members, even when they know that doing so will allow their loved one to live more safely. Often, there is a concern about how their parent will deal with their new surroundings and circumstances and the family caregiver is left wondering what to do to make the transition as easy and comfortable as possible.

The answer that many senior care facilities are coming to is "Stay involved!" Research shows that family involvement helps increase a resident's overall well-being in any senior living setting. Most skilled nursing facilities welcome a family's participation, because they understand it's a key element in helping the resident stay healthy and engaged in life.

Here are just a few ways family members can work with staff and other health providers to ensure their loved one is getting the care they need to thrive.

Let them know they are still in control. Before circumstances require an emergency move, talk to your loved one about your concerns and offer to accompany them to tour local facilities. Let them know they have a choice of where they want to live. When visiting different facilities, keep an upbeat attitude and praise things that would be beneficial to your loved one's well-being (e.g., "The library is a perfect place for

you to read your favorite novel!"). Once a decision has been made, help them with ideas on how to personalize their new room or apartment ("Susie's graduation picture would look great here!") and discuss with the staff what options they have in dining and decorating, if any.

Help them meet fellow residents. Part of the fear of moving to a new place is the fear of not fitting in. Accompany your loved one on moving day and help them meet their new neighbors. You may need to take the lead and introduce yourself; then introduce your loved one and mention that they are new to the community. Feeling part

of this new family will go a long way in helping ensure a loved one's long-term comfort, happiness and health.

Let the staff know of any special needs. Your loved one will fare better in their new environment if the staff is aware of any special needs (diet, exercise, activity preferences) they have. This is particularly true if your loved one is living with dementia. Because a new Memory Care resident may not be able to express their needs and desires, providing a historical background (achievements, careers, hobbies, etc.) of their life gives caregivers a way to connect more meaningfully with your loved one.

Visit often. One of the best things you can do for your loved one is to visit as often as possible. This will provide a needed sense of connection to what they

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Could Your Bifocals Trip You Up?

Preventing falls is a top senior safety goal. You're probably familiar with the list of ways to help older adults avoid a debilitating fall: Remove hazards in the home, such as throw rugs and clutter. Ask the doctor to review all the medications you take. Get plenty of exercise, including activities that improve balance. Wear sturdy, properly fitted shoes. Don't drink too much alcohol. Have regular eye exams and keep your glasses prescription up to date.

That last item is very important. Visual impairment is a major fall risk. But did you know that a common type of vision correction could potentially raise the risk of falling?

As we grow older, the lens of our eye becomes less flexible, making it harder to focus on things that are close up. We can wear reading glasses to compensate—but if we are also nearsighted, we also need a different prescription to see things that are far away. Some people have two pairs of glasses, one for distance and one for close-up. But most prefer to have multifocal lenses in their glasses. Bifocals provide clear vision for distance and close-up. Trifocals also have a third, middle range (for the distance of, say, a computer screen). Progressive lenses cover all the ranges with no lines or gaps, a convenient solution when we're switching our focus—for instance, when we're driving and need to see our hands, the instrument panel, and the road ahead of us. Or perhaps we are reading a book at the beach, looking up to focus on a person near us, then gazing out on the ocean.

However, fall prevention experts warn that bifocals, trifocals and multifocal (progressive) lenses may actually increase the risk of falling. A study appearing in *Optometry and Vision Science*, a journal of the American Academy of Optometry, found that the visual blurring caused by the near-vision portion of bifocals or multifocals could cause a senior to trip and fall. Said the publication's editor, Anthony Adams, OD, Ph.D., "Falls for the elderly can be quite seri-

ous in consequence, so adopting strategies for avoiding falls is very important. Our authors highlight the difficulty that bifocal and multifocal prescription glasses may create for the elderly, particularly if they gaze past the stepping point."

The problem stems from the fact that using our eyes while walking is a two-part process. We need to be looking

ahead so we can see where we're going and avoid hazards coming up. On the other hand, we need to watch our feet so we don't trip over debris, fall off a curb, or slip on a patch of ice. Yet when we look through the bottom area of our multifocal glasses, the view of our feet and the ground is blurred.

The study authors, who are from Queensland University of Technology in Australia, found

that this blur caused seniors in their study to experience "understepping errors"—not taking a large enough step, which could be very dangerous on uneven pavement or stairs. Study author Alex A. Black, BAppSc, Ph.D., said that seniors who wear bifocals should be very mindful to watch their step. He said, "Our findings support the benefits of gaze training to maintain gaze position on stepping locations when undertaking precision stepping tasks and to improve stepping accuracy and minimize the risk of slips and trips."

Ask your doctor for advice about walking with bifocal or multifocal lenses. Be especially careful during the adjustment period. There's a learning curve as you learn how to hold and move your head to see objects properly. Report any problems you're having with the prescription or the fit of your glasses.

And it may be that you need an alternate pair of glasses for an extra measure of safety. Dr. Black's team says that seniors could benefit from getting a second pair of glasses with only distance vision to wear while walking or otherwise active.

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Five Trends in Family Caregiving • Oral Health and Healthy Aging: A Powerful Connection • May is Healthy Vision Month Puzzle

Aging & Caregiving in the News

Information, updates and interesting tidbits from across the country and around the world.

- Older Americans Month 2017 theme is “Age Out Loud”
- A crafty way to protect your brain
- Seniors missing out on the shingles shot

May Is Older Americans Month 2017



Since 1963, Older Americans Month has been a time to celebrate older Americans, their stories, and their contributions. Led by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), the annual observance offers a special opportunity to learn about, support, and recognize our nation's older citizens. This year's theme, “Age Out Loud,” emphasizes the ways older adults are living their lives with boldness, confidence, and passion while serving as an inspiration to people of all ages. This is a great opportunity to focus on how older adults in our communities are redefining aging—through work or family interests, by taking charge of their health and staying independent for as long as possible, and through their community and advocacy efforts. We can also use this opportunity to learn how we can best support and learn from our oldest community members. Visit the official Older Americans Month website (<https://oam.acl.gov>) for more information.

Crafting May Be a Crafty Way to Protect the Brain

Many older adults are using “brain game” computer programs to provide the mental stimulation that has been found to promote brain health. A Mayo Clinic doctor recently noted that we don't have to spend our money on these special products to reap the benefits of mentally

engaging activities. Dr. Yonas Geda of the Mayo Clinic's Scottsdale, Arizona campus studied a group of seniors over a period of years, and found that those who took part in certain types of leisure-time activities were less likely to develop mild cognitive impairment, the slight memory deficits that might progress to Alzheimer's disease or other dementia. As you might have guessed, playing games and using the computer were found to be helpful—but folks who love to make things will be glad to know that Dr. Geda's study, which was published in *JAMA Neurology*, also says that doing crafts is beneficial in creating connections between various areas of the brain. So, join a quilting club. Sign up for a woodworking class. Take up knitting or crochet. Get into scrapbooking. Your brain will thank you! (Watch Dr. Geda explain the study [here](#).)

Experts: Many Seniors Missing Out on Protection Against Shingles

Shingles is a painful, and sometimes debilitating, condition that occurs when the virus that causes chickenpox is reactivated in later life. At the least, shingles causes a painful rash, fever and headache that lasts for several weeks—but it can also cause lasting nerve pain called postherpetic neuralgia. The risk of shingles and serious complications increases with age. In 2006, a vaccine was introduced to protect against shingles, and it is recommended for people age 60 and older. But a recent study published by the Infectious Diseases Society of America found that only 28 percent of people in that age range had received the vaccine. Said study author Dr. Hector S. Izurieta of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, “The fact that we found relatively high effectiveness against serious outcomes, such as hospitalization and postherpetic neuralgia, and that protection from these outcomes was sustained over time, adds to the considerable evidence that the vaccine is beneficial and that seniors should be encouraged to be vaccinated in higher numbers than what is happening currently.” Medicare requires all Part D drug plans to cover the vaccine, but check ahead of time to be sure you've selected a doctor or pharmacy that is in your plan.

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Resident's Care Team *from page 1*

hold most dear. When you visit, be sure and listen to any concerns your loved one has and, if possible, try to solve any issues they may be facing. Allowing your loved one

to express their feelings about their new environment will go a long way in making them feel less isolated. Also, visiting often will allow you to assess the care your loved one is receiving and raise any concerns you have to the staff.

Long-distance caregiving. What can you do if you don't live nearby? Long-distance caregiving makes staying in touch a bit more challenging, but you can still be an integral part of your loved one's care team. Here are some ways to keep in touch from a distance:

- Call often, and encourage your loved one to call you.
- If they express concerns – or even if they're lonely or depressed – contact the staff to try and resolve the issue.
- Set your loved one up with a simple email program if they aren't already online.
- Use a webcam or Skype for "virtual visits" – this can often reveal things that a regular phone call can't.
- Help your loved one create a Facebook page, or set up a family blog.
- Visit as often as possible.

And find out if your loved one's new community has a family council or other family organization. This can be a great way to create even more connections for your loved one—and for yourself. With a little care and attention, your elder loved one can thrive in a Skilled Nursing setting. The greater your involvement, the better they are likely to do.

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