

Living 50 Plus

News and Information for Nash County Seniors

Signs a loved one might need assisted living

Assisted living facilities provide an invaluable service. When a medical condition, developments associated with aging or another variable affects an individual’s ability to live independently, assisted living facilities can ensure such men and women get the help they need to live as fully and actively as possible.

It’s not always easy to identify when an individual may need to move into an assisted living facility. Some individuals choose to do so on their own, but families often make such decisions together. As families work to determine if a loved one should move into an assisted living facility, they can look for various signs that suggest the time is right to do so. According to the Elder Care Alliance, signs that an individual may benefit from assisted living include:

- Requiring routine reminders to take medication
- Noticeable changes in weight, including weight loss or gain
- Loss of mobility or increase in falls
- Signs that household maintenance is being neglected
- Difficulty with daily tasks like grooming and meal



preparation

- Increased isolation
- Loss of interest in hobbies

It’s important for families to recognize that some of the signs noted above might suggest the presence of a condi-

tion or disease that would not, if treated successfully, compromise an individual’s ability to live independently. For example, the SilverSneakers program offered through Tiv-ity Health notes that weight gain among seniors may be attributable to slower metabolism, a less active lifestyle or menopause for women. Each of those conditions can be addressed without requiring a relocation to an assisted living facility. Family members are urged to discuss anything that seems to be affecting a loved one’s ability to live independently with that person’s health care team before they consider if a person needs to move into an assisted living facility. It’s equally important to ask a loved one’s health care team which type of facility they think might be most beneficial if, in fact, they think it’s in an individual’s best interest to relocate. No two facilities are the same, and the Elder Care Alliance notes many specialize in specific types of care, such as tending to individuals with cognitive issues like dementia or physical issues like limited mobility.

Assisted living facilities help millions of individuals every day. Families can work together to decide if a loved one can benefit from moving into such a facility.

Tips to find a home health aid

A desire to live independently seems to be part of human nature. Though that desire may continue to burn as individuals approach retirement age, unforeseen circumstances like medical issues or the death of a partner may result in a need to work with a professional caregiver.

Home health aides (HHAs) can help aging individuals or those with certain physical or cognitive limitations live full lives without requiring them to move into assisted living facilities or seek alternative housing arrangements. HHAs provide a host of services, and individuals living in well-populated areas may have no shortage of options as they seek to hire a professional to help

themselves or a loved one with the tasks of daily life. Individuals or families beginning their search for a home health aide can keep these tips in mind.

- Identify the services required. The Family Caregiver Alliance® notes there are several main areas to assess when identifying which services individuals may need help with. Personal care consists of bathing, eating, dressing, toileting, and grooming. Household care involves cooking, cleaning, laundry, and shopping. HHAs who provide medical care may help clients manage medications, provide physical therapy and help clients get to their doctor’s appointments. Companionship is a component of emotional care, which also

may entail engaging clients in meaningful activities and conversation. Identifying the services required can help individuals and their families zero in on the professionals who can help them.

- Seek recommendations from trusted doctors and confidantes. An individual who needs daily assistance at home can ask his or her physician for recommendations (family members can ask as well). Physicians undoubtedly have had previous patients who have benefited from the services of HHAs, so they can likely recommend local professionals. Trusted confidantes, such as neighbors, relatives and friends, who have been in similar situations, or have family members who have

required HHAs, also can be an invaluable resource.

- Contact a local agency. The FCA notes that contacting a local Home Care Agency is a formal way to find an HHA for yourself or a loved one. Various agencies are likely in operation within a reasonable distance of a person’s home, though the FCA notes far fewer agencies serve rural areas. Contacting a local Home Care Agency can put individuals and their families in contact with professionals who can help match people with particular needs with HHAs who specialize in such care or have extensive experience providing a range of home care services.
- Look into a direct-hire group. AARP® notes that



direct-hire agencies maintain networks of independent caregivers and facilitate connections between those professionals and individuals and families seeking help. When working with a direct-hire group, inquire about their fees and ask if they can share any information regarding how to pay independent contactors who can be found through their agencies. It’s also im-

portant to ask if direct-hire groups formally vet professionals that can be found through them or if individuals and families must conduct their own background checks.

Individuals who need some assistance with daily living can employ various strategies to find home health aides who can provide such services.

How to overcome the lack of motivation to exercise

Exercise has its fair share of devotees and millions of others who recognize its value but still struggle to include workouts in their daily routines. Motivation can be a significant hurdle when it comes to exercise, and recent studies are a testament to that difficulty.

In a 2021 survey from the global fitness brand Orangetheory® Fitness and Kelton Global, 43 percent of respondents indicated they suffered from a lack of motivation to exercise. Lack of motivation can affect people of all ages, including seniors. However, seniors may be uniquely positioned to overcome their lack of motivation to exercise, particularly if they’re retired and have time on their hands. Seniors who aspire to exercise more frequently can consider these strategies if motivation becomes an issue.

- Exercise away from home. During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, a phenomenon that has been characterized as “basement burnout” developed. That referred to the lack of enthusiasm to exercise at home when gyms and other fitness facilities were forced to close as a public safety measure. Home workouts can become monotonous since most people do not have enough room at home to house the same array of equipment that’s available at their local gym. Seniors can overcome monotonous workouts by purchasing a gym membership at a local facility. Many clubs offer discounted rates to seniors and some even offer senior-specific fitness classes like yoga and Pilates.
- Employ the buddy system. Seniors also can enlist friends and family members to join them when they exercise. Encourage neighbors or friends to come along to the gym for a favored fitness

class, or invite friends and family on hiking excursions or daily walks. The National Institute on Aging notes that turning exercise into a social activity is a great way for seniors to maintain their motivation to exercise.

- Track your progress and celebrate your successes. The NIA touts the benefits of tracking progress when trying to stay motivated to exercise. As exercise efforts pay increasing dividends, seniors may find it’s no longer hard to stay motivated. Success can be measured in various ways. Some might aspire to produce healthier blood test results at the doctor’s office, while others may hope to lose a few pounds. However you define success, celebrate when you achieve your fitness goals. Rewards such as a spa day, a night out at the theater or a weekend getaway can provide all the

motivation you need to stay the course.

- Be flexible with your routine. Mobility issues and other physical limitations may affect seniors. But such issues need not prevent aging men and women from exercising, even if it does mean they won’t be able to hit the gym four or five days per week. Mix up your routine so you can still exercise even if physical limitations make traditional workout routines more challenging.

Go for nature walks on days when your body needs a break from strength-training, and check the forecast at the start of each week so you can rearrange your routine if Mother Nature makes outdoor exercise impossible on certain days.

Many people find it hard to stay motivated to exercise. Seniors can try a few strategies to ensure they stay the course with their fitness routines.

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Plan Ahead

You’ve got to admit it; no one should have to make these decisions for you. Giving a pre-plan to those you love gives everyone greater peace-of-mind. You can then live your life to the fullest, knowing you’ve done the right thing.

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Tips to keep your brain sharp as you age

Cognitive decline is on the minds of many adults as they get older. Memory loss and trouble processing things can sometimes be a side effect of aging, as Everyday Health says the brain changes in size and structure as a person gets older. These changes can affect how well the brain works over time. Furthermore, illnesses affecting the brain, such as Alzheimer’s disease, may start showing their symptoms in people when they’ve reached their mid-60s, says the National Institute on Aging.

Cognitive decline and dementia are not a certainty of aging. But older adults interested in strengthening their brains may want to consider these strategies.

Address high blood pressure

High blood pressure can increase the risk of heart disease and stroke. Maintaining healthy blood pressure and cholesterol levels is associated with better cognitive function, according to data published in 2021 in the Journal of Alzheimer’s Disease.

Use all your senses

Harvard Health says the more senses used in learning something, the more of the brain that is involved in retain-



ing the memory. Studies have shown that images paired with pleasant aromas leads to better recall later on.

Exercise regularly

Staying physically active helps maintain blood flow to the brain, which also helps reduce the risk for hypertension.

Eat brain-healthy foods

According to Cone Health Medical Group, studies show eating fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids, like tuna, salmon and mackerel, decreases risk for cognitive decline. People should avoid saturated fats, trans fats and hydrogenated oils.

Read and write frequently

According to a study in the journal Neurology, regular reading and writing in one’s older years reduced the rate of memory decline by 32 percent. Joining a book club or simply reading more on one’s own can improve cognition. Similarly, writing improves memory and communication abilities and can help strengthen the brain as well.

Drink healthy beverages

Tea and coffee can improve alertness and focus, as they’re rich in polyphenols and antioxidants. A Place for Mom says caffeine in these beverages can help solidify new memories. Avoid drinking sugary beverages and limit consumption of alcohol, as neither boasts brain-boosting properties. Keeping the brain sharp is a multilayered process that involves healthy foods and beverages, exercise and brain-stimulating activities.

Questions to ask before beginning a new fitness regimen

Exercise is widely recognized as a vital component of a healthy lifestyle. Despite that, a recent analysis of data from the 2020 National Health Interview Survey found that more than two-thirds of individuals are not getting enough exercise. Though the survey was conducted amid the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which suggests the overall figures might be somewhat lower than they might have been had the data been collected in a more typical year, just 28 percent of respondents were meeting the physical activity guidelines established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Routine exercise is beneficial for people of all ages, and seniors are no excep-

tion. Aging adults who want to be more physically active but think they are among the 72 percent of individuals who aren’t meeting CDC exercise guidelines can speak with their physicians and ask these three questions to ensure the transition to a less sedentary lifestyle goes smoothly.

1. Should I get a heart checkup?
- Doctors may already be monitoring aging individuals’ hearts even if they have not exhibited symptoms of heart problems in the past. However, it’s best to discuss heart health in greater detail prior to beginning a new fitness regimen. In an interview with Penn Medicine, Neel Chokshi, MD, MBA, medical director of Penn Sports

Cardiology and Fitness Program, noted the risk of heart attack or cardiac complications slightly increases when individuals begin to participate in a moderate or intense activity. So a physician might want to conduct a heart checkup in order to determine if a patient has an underlying heart condition.

2. Which types of activities should I look to?
- A physician also can recommend certain activities depending on a person’s age and medical background. Though exercise is beneficial for everyone, certain activities may not be. For example, AdventHealth notes that high-impact activities like jogging and jump rope may not be suited for individuals with arthritis. In addition, ag-

ing individuals with physical limitations that require them to use a wheelchair should not write off their ability to exercise, as physicians can recommend exercises for patients with mobility issues as well.

3. Should I take extra caution while on medication?
- Prescription medication use is another variable that must be taken into consideration before beginning a new exercise regimen. The CDC notes that roughly 84 percent of adults between the ages of 60 and 79 use one or more prescription medications. Each medication produces different effects, and a 2016 study published in the Methodist DeBakey Cardiovascular Journal noted that certain medications evoke



an acute drop in blood pressure, which can disturb balance and increase fall risk, while others actually facilitate greater improvements in health outcomes. That means the dynamic between medications and exercise is unique to each medication, which underscores the importance of speaking with a

physician whenever a fitness regimen is started or tweaked and/or a new medication is prescribed.

These are just three of the questions seniors can ask when discussing exercise with their physicians. Seniors are urged to ask any additional questions they might have during such discussions.

How caregivers work in concert with doctors

Managing an illness, disease or injury often requires a collaborative effort that involves a number of medical professionals, such as doctors and nurses. The support and assistance of family caregivers also is essential when managing illness. In fact, family members can play important roles when they work closely with medical professionals in helpful ways.

How can family caregivers assist doctors and nurses as their loved ones receive medical care? And what can medical professionals do to ensure caregivers are afforded the respect they deserve? There are many steps each can take.

- Become a communicator. Communication is key in a doctor-caregiver relationship. Doctors may strive for extreme focus on the

patients’ care, but they also can welcome input from family members who may have information that can help doctors work more effectively. Caregivers should not be afraid to speak up out of fear that their insight will be dismissed.

- Keep communications concise. In modern medical settings, health care professionals see many, many patients over the course of a day. This is likely followed by paperwork and then email or phone correspondence follow-up. Caregivers should realize that doctors and nurses are busy professionals and aspire to keep their communications concise.
- Be patient. According to the American Association for Physician Leadership and a 2018 survey by the Physicians Foundation,

doctors work 51 hours a week and see 20 patients per day on average. Unless there is an extreme medical emergency, family caregivers should not expect an immediate follow-up to a concern or question following a visit. However, most doctors offer a call or patient portal message when time allows.

- Aim for assertive, not aggressive, interaction. A family caregiver is often a patient’s most diligent advocate. But being too aggressive when interacting with nurses and doctors might lead the care team to view a caregiver as an adversary rather than an ally, advises AARP. Instead, it is best for caregivers to come across as informed, pleasant and respectful partners.
- Do your research. It is alright for a caregiver to


delve deeper into information about a patient’s condition so they can be as informed as possible. Also, he or she should feel free to reiterate care directions back to the medical staff to make sure that everything is understood and can be followed according to the plan established by the doctor.

- Prepare for appointments. During medical appointments, patients have the undivided attention of their doctors. This is the best time to ask questions, bring up concerns and provide follow-up about what is going on at home. Caregivers and patients can come ready with a list of items that have been jotted down on paper or itemized on a



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