



AGING TODAY

Making the Decision



By Bob Roth, Managing Partner of Cypress HomeCare Solutions

Making the decision that your aging parent or loved one is in need of assistance may be one of the most difficult decisions you will ever have to make. More than likely you will be met with resistance and you may find yourself in what may appear to be a “NO WIN” situation. Who is going to provide this assistance? Is it a family member or an outside service? Making this decision to get help is a good start.

An increasing number of families will face this decision and others as we approach the holiday season. For out-of-town visitors, seeing the condition of their elderly relative(s) in person may come as a shock. For those already intimately involved with caregiving responsibilities, the holidays, and the onset of winter, can bring about a number of emotional needs of our loved ones which can bring on even more challenges.

This year as we roll into the holidays, be on the lookout for signs that your aging relative may be in need of some assistance. Look for these signs of change; changes in health, mood, and living conditions can all be important indicators. In addition, family members should be speaking with the people who see their aging relative(s) on a daily basis to find out if they have noticed any recent changes.

Here is a list of ten specific signs to watch for:

- Personal hygiene problems - Poor grooming - sloppy appearance, infrequent bathing...
- Home in disarray or needing to be cleaned
- Weight loss or weight gain--check for spoiled food or insufficient food in the home
- Failure to manage medications or medical appointments
- Increased difficulty with mobility (such as climbing stairs or using a bathtub)
- Changes in judgment, mood, or overall behavior
- Increased forgetfulness -- check for unopened mail or unread newspapers
- Missed bill payments or other financial difficulties
- Unusual or extravagant purchases that are out of character

• Decreased social activities or failing to maintain friendships

These are difficult decisions for adult children and loved ones to ponder. Failure to do anything will create even greater difficulties down the road.

Here are some additional signs to look for:

- Basic tasks - difficulty eating, dressing, walking, cooking, managing medications...
- Isolation - not maintaining outside friendships or interests, no hobbies...
- Erratic Attitude - Paranoid, refuses to communicate, extremely argumentative, abusing alcohol or drugs...
- Dementia - consistent memory lapses, confusion, loss of reasoning skills, difficulty answering questions, gets lost walking or driving, inability to find the right word...
- Health - Black and blue marks (may be falling), bed wetting (urinary incontinence), dehydration (complaints of being thirsty), weight loss, problems swallowing...

If you find yourself in the position of caring for a loved one, it is important to know that caregivers should access the many resources available to them. Caregivers need information about caregiving and hands-on help. The idea that taking on the responsibility for an ailing or aging parent means that the caregiving adult child does everything by themselves, while simultaneously continuing to meet the demands of their own lives and families.

In our busy world, caregiving is already a complicated task, but when multiple family members are involved the complexities can lead to confusion, frustration and miscommunication. Who will take responsibility for what tasks? Often the majority of the work is delegated to the family member who has the most available time. Caregivers placed in this position harbor resentment which leads to the demise of family relationships, the most important support system the loved one so desperately needs.

In this situation a compromise is usually the best course of action for the loved one and the entire family. The primary caregiver may feel unappreciated or victimized because other family members feel he or she is not providing the best care. While neither side may want to be seen as “giving in” it may be in the best interests of the loved one to compromise. Outside evaluations from physicians or case or care managers may also prove helpful in deciding on the best course of action. Many loved ones would prefer to remain at home if the cost of care is not prohibitive or if the care necessity does not exceed what can be provided. Many times, a trained personal care provider can provide the majority of care when skilled nursing is not needed. Families should know that there are many options available for assistance. These include in-home care, day care, family counseling and other services.

The best course of action is to have a game plan. The family needs to sit down and assess their loved one(s) needs and evaluate if they have the skill sets within the family unit to care for their loved one, or do they need to seek outside assistance. Decisions involving care for a loved one should not be hurried or rushed in to. The family should take their time and weigh all the options available to them.

So, this holiday season take inventory of your loved ones. Especially those loved ones that are sitting around the holiday dinner table, take note of some of the signs that I have outlined for you above. If you recognize any of these signs, then this is a good the time to begin having the conversation about “making the decision” to provide them with some caregiving assistance.

This column was published in [Lovin' Life After 50](#) and [Jewish News](#) as Cypress' monthly contribution.