

NSLAP WELLNESS TIP: Caring For Aging Parents and Loved Ones: Safety in the home

The following is an article excerpt from Homewood Human Solutions™, your health and wellness provider.

Depending on your situation, there are a number of ideas and low cost solutions that will help to keep your loved one as safe as possible at home. The normal changes of aging, such as reduced eyesight and hearing or limited mobility, can affect strength and balance. In addition, medical conditions and medications taken for those conditions can also increase risk.

Falls are the main cause of accidents in people over the age of 65. Even a fall that does not cause an injury can limit confidence, and the ability to be out and about and living independently. By fall-proofing the home, not only are you increasing overall safety, but you are reducing the risk of injuries which may result in a loss of quality of life and independence.

Some critical fall-prevention tips to review with your loved one:

- Reduce clutter
- Scatter rugs should be removed or have a non-skid backing, and all shoes should have non-skid soles
- Check walking surfaces to avoid broken sidewalks, snow, or ice
- Watch pets that tend to get underfoot and might cause a fall
- Use handrails on all steps
- Keep extension cords out of the way.
- Make sure stairways and hallways have bright lights
- Review medications regularly
- Have grab bars put in bathrooms, showers, and toilets
- Don't climb on stools or stepladders

Safety and driving

Driving can play a big role in the lives of older adults – it means freedom and independence. Overall, older adults are relatively safe and conscientious drivers. However, factors such as declining vision, reduced physical strength, slowed reflexes, and even certain commonly taken medicines impair the ability to drive safely.

If you have a concern about your elder's driving habits, go for a drive with him or her and watch for early warning signs such as failure to yield right of way, drifting into other lanes, making a left turn without looking, difficulty backing up or turning, and slow response times. While it is important to treat the senior driver with respect and not jump to conclusions, it is important to help the elderly driver retire from the road when the time comes.

Some approaches that may help the senior to give up the keys:

- **Be understanding:** The conversation could get emotional and will require empathy and understanding on your part.
- **Involve others:** You may want to seek out assistance from someone in authority, such as a family doctor or occupational therapist, to help deliver the message.
- **Encourage a re-test:** If there is any doubt about the senior's driving ability, have them take a re-test.

- **Talk about safety considerations:** Remind the driver that they not only put themselves at risk, but that the safety of others is also at risk. It may be that they have already had an accident or some close calls.
- **Withdraw gradually:** Suggest the driver start by reducing night and highway driving.
- **Offer rides and visits:** Volunteer to come by on a regular basis to help with chores.
- **Suggest alternatives:** Help the senior see that living without a car won't make them permanently homebound. Let them know what other transportation options are available for them. Find out about home delivery for groceries. They may even want to investigate internet shopping.

Mobility matters

Remember, it's essential to be honest with the person you are caring for. If you think they may need a mobility aid such as a cane or walker, it may take a little persuasion, but is worth pursuing because it will make all the difference in keeping them safe, social, and independent.

In the highly specialized area of mobility equipment such as wheelchairs and scooters, families are often faced with an array of options, and find themselves having to choose – usually without sufficient knowledge. Be sure to purchase the equipment from an expert who will ensure the equipment satisfies the needs of your family member and that it will allow them to obtain maximum mobility and safety.

Here are some tips when choosing mobility equipment:

- Know what the product is expected to do
- Realize that one size doesn't fit all
- Beware of false economy – price isn't always the deciding factor
- Buy a reputable brand with a warranty
- Buy or rent from a qualified home health care dealer
- Ask about delivery timelines
- Consider the need for customization or modification as needs change
- Listen to the experts who will prescribe or recommend the best-suited piece of equipment
- Determine if the equipment is appropriate for use at home, outdoors, and in the community
- Find out if the equipment is easy to maintain and durable

*For additional information, support, resources and counseling on health and wellness, visit the NSLAP website at www.nslap.ca. Please note that **NSLAP** is your "company" name when you register. When you call the NSLAP number at **1-866-299-1299**, (Français: 1-866-398-9505; TTY: 1-888-384-1152) Your call will be answered any time, day or night, 365 days per year.*