

## When is Care a *Choice* or a *Necessity*?

Some people are willing to acknowledge physical or cognitive limitations that result from aging, illness or injury. Others refuse to admit or accept the fact that they may be struggling to cope with everyday life. So the question becomes at what point is care a choice or a necessity, and when might a person's inability to cope be viewed as self-neglect?

According to Mary Doepke, Owner of Home Helpers, "Just because a person is aging or has a life-altering illness does not mean he or she is unable to cope and make informed decisions. Likewise, if a loved one is making what others might consider bad decisions, that doesn't necessarily mean family should jump in and take over."

Whenever someone faces limitations, it's important to help the person realize the extent of his or her needs. Often the person benefiting from the assistance does not realize all that is being done to help. As a result, the person is unlikely to find a reason to make a choice for care as his or her needs are being met. What the person may not see is that family are exhausted and overwhelmed by their new responsibilities.

Doepke recommends that family members talk and share their wishes. "We find that people tend to be more open about discussing possible care needs when the needs are not imminent. Doing so tends to give loved one's more control over important aspects of life."

For many people, care becomes a necessity when family is unavailable to help, when something unexpected happens or there's a problem. The clearer the specific needs of a person are, the more confidence family members usually have in providing assistance and making care arrangements. Often the care provided by family is supplemented by professional caregivers, which helps ensure loved ones receive the care they need when and where they need it.

Many families struggle to figure out when a loved one can no longer cope and as a result neglects daily living activities and personal care needs. Self-neglect is when a person becomes unwilling or unable to care for him or herself and whose behaviors threaten his or her own health or safety.

Whether a person is at the point where care becomes a necessity as a result of functional limitations or a person is unwilling or unable to provide for him or herself, the indicators are often similar.

- A person's bathing, grooming, dressing and personal care behaviors become noticeably different or less frequent than in recent years.
- The home often becomes cluttered with junk, laundry piles up and the house becomes dirty.
- A change in eating habits often becomes apparent through sudden weight loss, a decline in overall well-being, and the cupboards and refrigerator are often bare or contain expired foods.

Doepke added, "If you have concerns but are not sure a person needs assistance with daily living activities, trust your instincts. Chances are it's time to make arrangement so that people get the care and support they need and deserve."

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## For Your Information

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### Baby Boomers At Risk For Developing Alzheimer's Disease

According to the *2008 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures* released on March 18 by the Alzheimer's Association, for people who live to age 55 years, women have a 17% lifetime risk for developing Alzheimer's disease and men have a 9% risk. The figures indicate that of the 78 million baby boomers, 10 million can expect to develop Alzheimer's in their lifetime. If other forms of dementia are included, the number increases to 14 million people. To read the 43-page report, visit: [www.alz.org/national/documents/report\\_alzfactsfigures2008.pdf](http://www.alz.org/national/documents/report_alzfactsfigures2008.pdf).

### May Is Older Americans Month

This year's theme is "Working Together for Strong, Healthy, and Supportive Communities," which speaks to the opportunities we have to create better care and reinforce healthier societies for all ages. Working together, our communities can improve older adults' overall quality of life by helping them:

- Make behavioral changes in their lifestyle that can reduce risk of disease, disability, and injury.
- Obtain the tools they need to make informed decisions about, and gain better access to, existing health and long-term care options in their communities.
- Develop more options to delay placement in nursing homes and remain at home as long as possible.



Americans of all ages and backgrounds can celebrate Older Americans Month. Contact your local Agency on Aging and volunteer for activities in your area, promote community, state and national efforts to serve older adults, and find ways to enrich the lives of the older adults who touch your life. By working together, we can improve the health and well being of our nation's older adults and pave the way for future generations.

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## People Get Ready – 1 in 8 to Develop Alzheimer's

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Last month the Alzheimer's Association released a report that suggests one in eight baby boomers will be stricken with the illness at some point in life. While hopefully the mind-robbing disease will pass us by, we do suggest people become familiar with the signs and symptoms of dementia. Equally important, baby boomers and their families should consider the implications and prepare themselves just in case.

Since Alzheimer's affects a person's mind, let's start by understanding the three primary aspects of cognitive function:

1. **Awareness** has to do with interest, concentration, and consciousness. For example, people tend not to pay much attention to subjects that don't interest them.
2. **Memory** involves the ability of a person to store, retain and recall information. As we age, it often takes longer to remember names and details.
3. **Intelligence** has to do with knowledge accumulated over the years and the ability to solve problems and make decisions. With age, choices may not be as intuitive or obvious.

So what are some signs and symptoms of normal aging (Stage 1) and of dementia? With age, many people experience very mild cognitive decline and TOT experiences (Stage 2). TOT stands for Tip of the Tongue. For example, people forget words, names, where they put the keys, and what they went to the kitchen to get. These things tend to be more annoying than compromising.

The next stage (Stage 3) is where there are noticeable problems with concentration and memory. People also find it increasingly challenging to learn, remember, plan and organize. When there is a discernable change in cognitive function, it is wise to see a medical professional. Up to this point, most people are able to live and function independently.

For the next two stages (4 and 5), people tend to need supervision and benefit from frequent assistance. People are less aware of recent and current events. There is diminished ability to handle complex tasks, such as process and follow instruction, handle independent living activities, and manage finances, and personal care activities become increasingly challenging. During these stages, people may seem withdrawn, have trouble with details, and repeatedly ask questions.

For the final two stages (6 and 7), safety becomes a primary concern, and people need on going assistance with functional and medical needs. It is at this point that personality changes become noticeable, wandering becomes a concern, and compulsive and repetitive behaviors become apparent. Especially challenging for many people is that the faces and names of family become unfamiliar. With late-stage Alzheimer's or dementia, appearance, movement, speech and other challenges occur.

So what are some implications and why is it important for people to be prepared? A primary concern for family is that they often find themselves taking on the role of family caregiver. The responsibilities of caring for a person with dementia affects all aspects of life. In addition to providing physical and emotional support, many families will find themselves providing financial assistance.

We suggest that families acknowledge that everyone is at risk for developing Alzheimer's or another dementing disease. We encourage conversations to help clarify a person's wishes and find out what he or she might want family to do should driving, preparing meals, managing finances or handling independent living activities become a concern. Also, discuss expectations, roles and responsibilities. Remember, it is much easier to carry out a person's wishes when you know what his or her wishes are.



## HOME HELPERS – *Making Life Easier*™

Home Helpers offers personalized care services similar to the care and support that is often provided by family members. We tailor our services and schedules to address our clients' needs.

Home Helpers begins with a free in-home consultation, preferably at the care recipient's residence. This gives us the opportunity...

- To meet the client and assess the situation.
- To make sure the requested services can be properly and safely performed.
- To ensure the Caregiver assigned possesses the personality, skill set and passion that best meet your loved one's needs.

Home Helpers' experienced and compassionate Caregivers are bonded, insured and carefully screened. Our Caregivers are employees, not subcontractors, thereby minimizing client liability.

To learn more about Home Helpers, give us a call at 708-783-1220 or visit us on the web at [www.MaryandMikeCare.com](http://www.MaryandMikeCare.com)

Conscientious Care is a bi-monthly newsletter produced by Home Helpers. We hope you found this edition to be informative and helpful.

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