

MEDICAL WELL-BEING CROSSROAD

CONNECTION FOR CAREGIVERS

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Definition

This CrossRoad will discuss the older adult's and the caregiver's efforts to maintain or achieve what they personally define as good health and is more than the lack of physical illness.

Glossary of Terms

A list of terms you may come across while researching this topic.

Search Our Database

On the Navigating the CrossRoads main page you will find a drop down menu of pre-populated search terms that will bring you to a list of Central Massachusetts agencies and programs that relate to this topic. You may also [CLICK HERE](#) to go to our Guide to Elder Services, an online searchable database, to do more extensive searches or for results in a specific zip code, city/town or Central Massachusetts geographic region. ***If you are unable to find a keyword on the pre-populated list and it consists of two terms, transpose the order of the terms i.e. to search for Health Education use the keyword Education, Health.*

Helpful Links

A list of outside websites to visit for further information.

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Please remember as you read the following material and have further questions we strongly encourage you to contact the resources listed below:

- Serving the Health Information Needs of Elders (SHINE) in Massachusetts:
 - 1-800-AGE-INFO or 1-800-243-4636 or 1-800-872-0166 TTY
 - MassMedLine-Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Services
 - 1-866-633-1617 (toll free) or 508-373-0031 or 1-800-439-2370 TTY
 - For more information, [CLICK HERE](#) to visit our website for support groups and chats with SHINE and pharmacists from MassMedLine
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This information was written with older adults in mind and is meant to provide a general overview of medical care options for older adults. The information provided does not discuss every aspect of this topic. This information does not constitute legal nor medical advice. We encourage you to consult with competent professional and/or legal representatives for advice.

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Introduction

An individual's well-being is a broad concept. It is determined by more than just the presence or lack of physical and mental diagnoses and symptoms. One's overall well-being is a personal understanding of his/her own mental health, physical health, financial state, happiness, and any other influences on his/her total life satisfaction.

An individual cannot completely control his/her medical well-being but they can choose to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Being proactive about one's own health by eating well, exercising often, having regular medical check-ups and sleeping enough to feel rested should be part of an individual's daily routine to stay healthy. Although it can be challenging to reach all of these goals while balancing life's obligations, they are very important to physical and mental well-being. Another barrier is that the medical care system can be difficult for both older adults and caregivers to navigate. However, staying organized, being informed and advocating for the older adult and yourself can greatly improve your experiences in the healthcare system. Only you can assess your overall well-being and the need to make changes and seek help.

This may mean that the older adult and you, the caregiver, need to seek help from family, friends and professionals. Both of you may need to be flexible and willing to accept help from others in order to improve the situation that you find yourselves in. One aspect of medical well-being that can be extremely challenging is making decisions regarding the many options that you will be presented with. If either of you, are tired or overwhelmed, it may be harder to make good decisions. Planning ahead and having a good support system can help you both succeed.

Physical Health Of The Caregiver

Caring for an older adult's physical and mental needs is an essential part of caregiving. However, in order to do that, it is crucial to keep yourself physically and mentally healthy. Caregivers face unique health challenges. Caregiving can have both positive and negative effects on your physical and mental health and well-being. Research has found a connection between caregiving and an increased risk for physical and mental health issues. The responsibilities and obligations that you have as a caregiver can place a large burden on you. Caregiver burden is the emotional, physical, and financial toll that caregiving can have on you which can increase your stress level. Higher stress levels can have serious consequences on both mental and physical health. It has been shown that stress can lead to anxiety, depression, heart disease, high blood pressure, substance abuse and more. Caregivers who are older adults themselves are especially at risk for the physical consequences and have been shown to have a higher mortality rate than that of non-caregivers in the same age range. If the stress you feel because of your caregiver burden is negatively affecting you physically or mentally, it should not be ignored. There are ways to reduce stress which can improve your caregiving role. [CLICK HERE](#) to visit our Mental Well-Being CrossRoad for more information.

Finding ways to reduce your stress is a critical part of your caregiving plan. As such, it is important that you continue to attend your own medical appointments and seek treatment for any physical or mental health symptoms you experience. Inform all medical professionals you see that you are a caregiver so they can best care for you. In particular make sure that your primary care physician knows about your caregiving role and how much stress you are feeling. Keeping yourself healthy will not only help you remain in your caregiving role longer, but it will contribute to a more fulfilling caregiving experience. You cannot properly care for someone else if you are not taking care of yourself. Sometimes, this means asking for help.

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Physical Health Of The Older Adult

Older adults have unique health needs in comparison to younger adults. They often have greater health problems and are taking more medications than younger adults. Caring for an older adult can be an overwhelming responsibility. Providing guidance and support regarding the medical care of the older adult can be confusing. There are steps you and the older adult can take to manage his/her physical health, safety and independence. From scheduled activities, like taking medications and attending medical appointments, to medical emergencies there are a number of ways you can assist the older adult in being organized and proactive. You need to be aware that negative health consequences can happen even if you are providing the best care you can. Older adults will experience varying levels of decline due to their aging process that you, as a caregiver, cannot control.

****Caregiver Hint:** *There are some medical terms and topics that are more specific to older adults, but most of the medical suggestions apply to people of all ages...even you!*

Access To Information

Caregivers who are involved in the older adult's medical care may face obstacles, one of which is access to information. Many medical practices will allow a patient to give another person access to his/her medical information by signing a release form. Some forms will allow the caregiver access to ongoing medical information, including the right to call the medical office and ask questions about the older adult's health status. Other forms will allow the caregiver access to all or a portion of the older adult's medical records. Discussing the options available for medical information disclosure with the older adult and his/her medical providers is a good first step in becoming a partner in his/her medical care.

It is also helpful to talk with the older adult about what might happen medically in the future. Although it might be hard to talk about, planning ahead for a serious illness and knowing the older adult's wishes is vital. It is critical to make the older adult's wishes known to others on the CareTeam who are involved in decision making. You also need to plan ahead for situations where someone on the CareTeam is no longer able to provide their typical caregiver duties. This ranges from knowing who will drive an older adult to the grocery store if the usual driver calls in sick to who will take over the primary caregiving duties if the primary caregiver becomes unable to continue providing such support. The importance of planning ahead for a variety of potential crises cannot be stressed enough.

Making Medical Decisions For The Older Adult

There are a variety of legal documents that you may come across during your role as a caregiver. One legal document that every person over the age of eighteen should have in place is a health care proxy. A health care proxy designates someone to make medical decisions when an individual is not able to do so themselves. When designating someone to be your health care proxy, make sure the individual is someone you trust and will be able to carry out medical decisions according to your wishes.

If the older adult you are caring for has a clinical diagnosis that prevents him/her from making appropriate mental and physical health decisions and has no health care proxy, guardianship may have to be sought through the court system. Guardianship grants an individual the authority to handle another person's medical decisions in addition to other personal and financial matters. [CLICK HERE](#) for visit our Legal & Financial section for more information.

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****Caregiver Hint:** Have all legal documents in an easily accessible and safe location. Also remember to inform others as to where they are located.

Choosing A Medical Professional

Having regular medical check-ups is an important part of good health. Medical check-ups can be done by a family practice physician, primary care physician, physician's assistant, registered nurse practitioner, or a physician who practices internal medicine. They can be done yearly or more frequently to check-in on you or the older adult's health status. Those with chronic health conditions or with current health problems may need to meet with their primary care physician (PCP) more often. Certain medical conditions may require care from a doctor with training in a specific field of medicine. Medical specialties that you may encounter include surgery, neurology, gastroenterology, hematology, oncology, podiatry, or infectious disease, among others.

You may be involved in helping the older adult to select medical professionals to be involved on the CareTeam. It is important to keep in mind that all medical personnel are crucial allies to you and the older adult. The most important physician is the doctor that has been selected to be the primary care physician (PCP) because he/she will coordinate overall medical care and referrals. You should encourage the older adult to select a primary care physician that he/she can work with while in good health as well as during times of poor health.

There are many things that you can do to build a partnership with the older adult's medical providers. When choosing a medical professional, make a list of what is most important for the older adult and for you. Then try to find a professional who suits those needs and is affordable given the financial situation of the older adult. You may choose to meet with multiple potential medical providers in person to see which ones you both prefer.

Things to consider when selecting medical providers for the CareTeam include:

- Find medical providers who are willing and able to explain diagnoses, treatments, and prescriptions in a way that the older adult and everyone involved in the CareTeam can understand
- Keep in mind the medical professionals affiliated with any physician's office such as a physician's assistant, registered nurse, nurse practitioner, licensed practical nurse, and medical technician because at times you may see these people instead of the physician for care. Also observe the secretary, office manager and other administrative support staff because they are the ones you will be speaking with regarding scheduling, obtaining records, and billing
- Which hospital the physician works at or is affiliated with
- The location of the medical office and how easy or hard it would be to get there
- Whether the practice is small or large
- Whether the provider is male or female
- What languages do the providers speak
- The medical professional's understanding and acceptance of any religious beliefs, cultural beliefs and sexual orientation of the older adult
- Whether or not the older adult's insurance covers services offered by the medical provider
- The office hours and how the office handles after hours questions and medical emergencies

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Board of Registration in Medicine keeps detailed information about the licensing status, areas of medical specialty, hospital affiliations, education and training, as well as discipline history of each licensed doctor in Massachusetts. Educating yourself about the older adult's medical providers and building a partnership with them is one of your most important

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caregiver health maintenance roles. When you select a new medical professional be sure to provide the names of each of the older adult's other doctors as well as any previous doctors. This will help make sure that each physician can access any information that he/she needs. For more information, [CLICK HERE](#) to visit Mass.gov, Board of Registration website.

It may be helpful to consult medical professionals with training in the field of geriatrics. This field of medicine deals with aging, illnesses, and the care of older adults. A geriatrician or geriatric physician has specific knowledge of the aging process and specialized skills in the diagnosis, therapy, and prevention of disease for the older population. There are also doctors who specialize in geriatric neurology, geriatric psychiatry, geropsychology, geriatric dentistry, and other specialties.

In addition to doctors, you may also meet "allied health professionals". Allied health is a term used to describe the many therapeutic and supportive service professionals you will find in the medical care system. Physical therapists, occupational therapists, athletic trainers and their assistants are all allied health professionals. There are other medical professionals that you may have on your CareTeam such as: dietitians, medical assistants, respiratory therapists and many more. For more information, [CLICK HERE](#) to visit the Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation website. You may also want to check the license status of health professionals such as pharmacists, nurses and dentists. For more information, [CLICK HERE](#) to visit the Office of Health and Human Services website.

****Caregiver Hint:** *These same tips can be helpful in selecting your own physician, not just the older adult's physician. You should have a primary care physician and make sure to take care of your own medical needs.*

Organizing Medical Information

You and the older adult may benefit from creating a CareTeam Binder, a three-ring file holder. One of the most important things that you will keep here is all of the older adult's medical information. Keeping important items together and in chronological order will allow for easy access to information. Be sure to add new medical information to the binder as the older adult's health or care plan changes. You might include the following information in the CareTeam Binder:

- A list of current medical providers and their contact information
- Copies of insurance cards and all insurance information
- Calendar of medical appointments and tests
- Test results
- Calendar of the older adult's regularly scheduled activities
- Contact information for all members of the CareTeam
- Contact information for social and medical transportation used by the older adult including van transportation services, taxi services, ambulance services, friends/family/neighbors who regularly provide transportation, etc.
- A list of current medications with dosage amounts including over the counter medications
- A list of local healthcare centers, urgent care centers, walk-in clinics and the older adult's hospital preference
- Contact information for local fire, ambulance, and medical transportation firms
- Contact information for the pharmacy where the older adult's prescriptions are filled as well as contact information for the closest 24 hour pharmacy
- A list of allergies such as food, medication, and other
- A list of dietary restrictions and preferences
- A health care proxy, legal guardian documents, power of attorney, and other legal health documents such as a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) order, Do Not Intubate (DNI) order, Do Not

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Hospitalize (DNH), etc. [CLICK HERE](#) to visit our Legal & Financial CrossRoad for more information.

- A list of established medical conditions and diagnoses with the date of the diagnosis
- Contact information for relatives or friends who need to be reached in case of an emergency like a serious illness or death
- Blank paper for notes from anyone on the CareTeam to write during a visit to the older adult's residence or at a medical visit

It is important to have multiple copies of these legal and medical documents in the CareTeam Binder as well as in other secure locations. Having these documents with several people will help to guarantee that they will be available when needed. Also, if an urgent trip to the hospital is necessary, medical professionals will need some of these documents. Be sure to give medical professionals a copy and not the original in case it is not returned.

Keeping up-to-date records and copies of medical reports on hand for easy reference will contribute to better health maintenance. The Caregiver's Organizer, available through the Central Massachusetts Family Caregiver Support Program, is one way to make sure that all important phone numbers and information is available in one place. The organizer contains easy to work with forms and tables for organizing the older adult's information. It is also available in other languages on our website. Keeping the pages from the organizer in the CareTeam Binder will help you easily update and access information quickly. [CLICK HERE](#) to visit our website for a copy of the Caregiver's Organizer.

****Caregiver Hint:** *This is a great way for anyone to keep their medical information accessible. Making a binder of your own health information will help you organize your records when you need it. All adults should have legal medical documents prepared ahead of time in case of an emergency.*

Choosing A Hospital

It is important that the older adult decides which hospital they would like to receive health services from. This hopefully is done well before a crisis occurs. If his/her primary care physician works in a certain hospital or has privileges at certain ones, this might help with your decision. If not, then look at other factors like:

- The quality and variety of doctors there
- The quality of the staff at the hospital
- How easy the hospital is to get to for each of you
- The quality of the emergency room
- The reputation of the hospital in general
- If the older adult's insurance plan covers the hospital and emergency transportation to it

If you choose the hospital ahead of time then there is no confusion on where to go in an emergency situation. If the older adult needs an emergency transport in an ambulance, he/she should request to be taken to the hospital of their choice. Be aware that in some emergency situations the emergency personnel may determine that the older adult must instead go to the nearest hospital.

****Caregiver Hint:** *You should select a hospital of choice ahead of time as well because going to the hospital is often a sudden and unexpected event. If the hospital is already chosen, you will have one less thing to think about in the event of an emergency. You can use the same process and guidelines to choose your hospital as you used with the older adult.*

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Health Insurance

There are many different health insurance companies and types of health insurance available for older adults. Whether the older adult has a private health insurance policy, Medicare, MassHealth (Medicaid) or a combination of these, become familiar with his/her health insurance plans. If you know what kind of health insurance he/she has and where the insurance cards and information are located when there is an emergency you will be more prepared. Also, keep in mind that health insurance plans may need to be switched as the older adult's health needs change. In addition, many health plans change their covered services annually.

[CLICK HERE](#) to visit our section on Medicare for more information.

[CLICK HERE](#) to visit our section on MassHealth for more information.

[CLICK HERE](#) to visit our section on Veterans Benefits for more information on TRICARE.

Many older adults may have questions about health benefits. The Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs sponsors the Serving the Health Information Needs of Elders (S.H.I.N.E.) program. S.H.I.N.E. Counselors are a network of certified volunteers who assist Medicare beneficiaries age 62 and over and younger individuals with disabilities. These volunteers are trained to provide individual unbiased information on health insurance options including Medicare, Medicare Supplemental Plans, Medicare Part D (drug coverage), MassHealth (Medicaid) and free hospital care. [CLICK HERE](#) to visit our website for more information on S.H.I.N.E.

Another aspect of health insurance that can be confusing is the cost of medical services and billing. You should research the costs of appointments, tests, and other services ahead of time when possible with the older adult's physician or insurance company so that you know what costs to expect. Be aware that the bill may be made up of fees from different doctors, tests and facilities. When the older adult receives a medical bill, it is very important to go over it carefully because there can be mistakes that could cost the older adult money. If you find something that seems incorrect, contact the billing department of the medical provider. When a bill includes an out of pocket expense be sure to call the older adult's insurance company to see if they will cover more of the cost. Do not pay the bill unless you are sure that all of the services that are charged are correct.

****Caregiver Hint:** *You should also be familiar with your own medical insurance so that you know what is covered and what is not. You should scrutinize any medical bills you receive for your own healthcare just as carefully as the ones you receive for the older adult.*

Before A Medical Appointment

It is important to be prepared ahead of time for a medical appointment in order to make the best use of the time you have with the medical professional. Some ways that you and the older adult can prepare for an appointment are:

- Confirm the appointment a day or two before to make sure that you have the correct day and time. Some offices will call or mail a reminder to confirm the appointment
- Discuss with the older adult the importance of being honest. This may include revealing unflattering or embarrassing behaviors and information to medical professionals
- Remember to bring the CareTeam Binder. In that binder, write down:
 - Symptoms as they happen so that you or the older adult will remember to mention them to their medical professional
 - Be as specific and concise as possible
 - Even if you think symptoms may be a normal part of aging mention them at the appointment in case they are caused by a medical condition, an illness, or a side effect or complication from medication
 - Any changes in or new symptoms

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- A list of all questions, making sure to bring as many up as possible at the appointment. In case the medical appointment is rushed, put the most important questions at the top of the list and discuss those first
- Any changes in health that have happened since the last visit. If the older adult has been to the emergency room, had surgery, or had any major changes in his/her health, the medical professional needs to be told
- Any major changes in the older adult's personal life such as if he/she has lost a spouse or other loved one or has moved. This could affect his/her health and the medical professional should be aware

****Caregiver Hint:** *This method of preparing for a medical appointment can help you be as ready as possible for your own medical appointments. Do not neglect your own health while you're caring for an older adult.*

At A Medical Appointment

Trust and effective communication with medical providers starts with the patient. Medical professionals rely on the information they receive from patients and their caregivers to make decisions and recommendations. Being honest and willing to disclose unflattering behaviors, symptoms and information to medical providers are important for building trust. Attending all medical appointments and following medical professionals' instructions closely will also help build trust. Partnering with medical providers and understanding the information they provide will go a long way in preventing health problems and achieving better health. When attending a medical appointment it may be helpful to;

- Have the older adult ask someone like you, a friend, or a family member attend medical visits with them. That way, there is someone else there to bring up any questions or concerns, remind the older adult of topics he/she wanted to discuss. Take notes on what the medical professional says, and remind the older adult of the discussion later if he/she cannot remember all of the details
- Be early or on time
- Bring the CareTeam Binder with all of the medical information so that any questions that the medical professional might have about the older adult's medical history can be answered accurately
- Try to be clear and concise with all descriptions and concerns
- Add blank papers to the CareTeam Binder and bring a pen to the appointment in order to write down what the doctor says, as it can be difficult to remember everything. This will help ensure that you have all of the information that you and the older adult need from the doctor
- Ask the medical professional to slow down, repeat things, or write down information if you or the older adult has trouble understanding. This can be especially helpful when medications and conditions have names that are difficult to understand and spell
- Bring a tape recorder to the appointment to make it easier to review the medical professional's instructions accurately. You need to ask the medical professional's permission in order to record the appointment. If you or the older adult has aids for seeing or hearing, like glasses or a hearing aid, make sure to have them at the appointment
- Tell the medical professional if you and/or the older adult have financial concerns. It is okay to ask a medical professional what the cost of a test or treatment will be. He/she may be able to recommend less expensive alternatives and help decide if some services are unnecessary
- Sit in the waiting room after the appointment and write down more notes while you still remember. You can also write down any questions that you think of

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Remember, the appointment is for the older adult and the caregiver is there to help. The caregiver attending the appointment can play either a passive role by simply listening or a more active role by asking questions. Which role you play and how actively involved you are in the appointment will depend on the older adult's needs, personality and relationship with you as the caregiver. It may be helpful to discuss with the older adult before the medical appointment what type of role you will play. When possible it is better to let the older adult lead the discussion and for you to help when necessary.

If you and the older adult are confused by anything that the medical professional says, or have any further questions, it is very important to ask. Asking for clarification helps make sure that both of you fully understand the older adult's health and what can be done to improve it. Medical professionals should be able to answer most questions, but if they cannot they may refer you and the older adult to an outside professional for more assistance.

Do not forget to ask about follow-up appointments and when to expect the results from any tests performed. If the medical professional does not have time to answer all questions, there are others in the office that may be able to help. A nurse or physician's assistant may be available to answer your questions right away instead of having to wait for the doctor.

****Caregiver Hint:** *These strategies can make your own medical appointments more successful as well. Continue talking to your medical professionals about your role as a caregiver and the possible burden and stress associated with it. Update them on any major changes in this situation that could affect your health.*

At The Hospital

Although many health concerns can be addressed through regular medical appointments, sometimes it becomes necessary to go to the hospital. Reasons for this could be an emergency, a condition that requires more care than can be given at home, a scheduled surgery or a visit with a specialist. When a trip to the hospital happens, it can be overwhelming and scary, especially if the emergency room is involved. Always being prepared for a potential hospital visit will make this easier and smoother. Be aware that there are many factors at the hospital that cannot be controlled. The experience may not go exactly as planned but try to make the best of the situation and be willing to adapt to new circumstances.

When a trip to the hospital happens:

- Bring any personal items that will make the older adult feel more comfortable in the hospital room as well as items that you may need. If you expect that he/she might go into the hospital, it can be helpful to prepare a bag of personal items ahead of time to bring with you. This could include toiletries, pajamas, underwear, and any other personal items he/she would need in the hospital
- Give copies of necessary legal and medical documents to both the emergency room staff and the medical staff in the older adult's room
- Write down the room number, room phone number, and nursing station phone number so that you can reach the older adult or nurses easily
- Learn the name of the older adult's attending physician and how to reach him/her
- Make sure that your name and all contact information is available to any hospital staff caring for the older adult so that they can reach you
- Talk to the nurses caring for the older adult and make sure they know you are the caregiver. They can answer many of your questions during the hospital stay

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- Make sure that the older adult knows where the “call button” is and that he/she can reach it. This button will bring a medical professional to the room if one is needed. Make sure that the older adult knows that he/she can push this button when in need of assistance, even if it’s not an emergency
- Stress to the older adult that he/she should call for assistance in getting up to walk around or go to the bathroom. The older adult may be weaker than they realize due to medical conditions or medications so requesting assistance may be necessary. Older adults are at risk for falling in the hospital, potentially prolonging their stay, if they do not request assistance
- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer often while visiting the hospital in order to prevent any infections and germs from spreading
- Find out when doctors and specialists will most likely visit so that you can be prepared and present
- Create a separate Hospital Log to keep in the hospital room and write down the names of any doctors or specialists that visit the older adult. Also write down new medications and any tests done with the results as you receive them. If you need help understanding test results it is best to ask a medical professional. You may also consult a trusted internet resource. [CLICK HERE](#) to visit the Lab Tests Online website for more information. This information can be added to the CareTeam Binder at a later date
- If you have any questions about whom the different medical professionals are or why they are seeing the older adult, do not be afraid to ask. It is important to understand what is going on and you should ask questions about anything that is unclear. Write down the answers in the Hospital Log so that you will remember them later
- If there are other members of the CareTeam who spend time with the older adult in the hospital while you’re not present they can write down any updates in the Hospital Log
- Write down any questions and concerns as they come up so you remember to ask them when a medical professional is present
- Being concise with questions can help because many of the medical professionals are rushed
- If you are the power of attorney or health care proxy for the older adult, learn your role and rights in the event that the older adult is not capable of making decisions on his/her own. [CLICK HERE](#) to visit our Legal & Financial CrossRoad for more information
- If you want to spend the night with the older adult, ask about the hospital policy. Some hospitals allow you to stay overnight with a patient and will provide you with a reclining chair or a cot. However, hospital policies vary so ask the hospital what their rules are
- If you are unhappy with the care being provided or have other concerns regarding the hospital ask to speak with hospital staff, such as a patient advocate or social worker

****Caregiver Hint:** *It is important to plan and prepare for all types of emergencies that might arise. You should keep a bag packed with personal items you will need if you are called to an emergency and need to stay overnight. If you are a long distance caregiver, have airline, car rental, and hotel information easily accessible.*

This advice applies to any stay in the hospital, so It is good to be prepared in case you need to be admitted. As organized and prepared as you may be, you might need help from someone else if you are admitted to the hospital, so ask a family member or friend to help you through your hospital visit.

Create a backup plan that designates who will be able to provide care to the older adult if you are unable to. Make sure the contact information for this person is available and that he/she can access anything needed to care for the older adult.

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Hospital Discharge

People tend to be discharged from the hospital more quickly today than they used to be, so it is important to think about it early on in the hospital stay. Start planning for discharge as soon as the older adult goes into the hospital. Hospital staff such as, a discharge coordinator, social worker, case manager or nurse, will work with you to make plans for the older adult's discharge. Make sure that hospital staff knows you are the caregiver of the older adult and that you'd like to be involved in the process.

You can ask medical professionals at the hospital for an estimate of how long the stay will be. Although no one can be sure of a timeline for a hospital stay, as there may be unexpected changes, having a general estimate can help the CareTeam make plans.

Ask yourself these questions before the older adult is discharged:

- Where will the older adult go after discharge?
- Can the older adult return to the prior living environment?
- Should the older adult go to a rehabilitation facility after discharge?
- Does the older adult need to go to a facility that will provide more assistance than can be provided in the community? What kind of facility would suit his/her needs? [CLICK HERE](#) to visit our Housing CrossRoad for more information.
- Will this move be temporary or permanent?
- What kind of paperwork needs to be filled out?
- What new services are needed for the older adult?
- Who will pay for any new services or equipment required for the older adult?
- If the older adult is returning home, what new items will be needed?
- If the older adult needs constant care who will provide it (family, friends or professional caregiver)?
- Is the house safe for the older adult to return to? Some changes may need to be made, such as:
 - Adding railings and ramps
 - New medical equipment such as walkers, wheelchairs, hospital beds or oxygen tanks may need to be purchased or rented. If the older adult is getting new equipment, make sure that you completely understand how to use it before the older adult is discharged back into your care
 - The medical staff at the hospital can tell you what the older adult will need at home and how to get it there
- Before leaving the hospital do not forget to:
 - Make sure that the older adult's new medical records are sent to his/her primary care physician and that the CareTeam Binder is updated
 - Update the list of medications if there are any new ones from the hospital visit and make sure new prescriptions are available wherever the older adult will be discharged
 - If the older adult is being discharged to a facility be sure to check with the facility about any information they may need from the hospital
- Talk to the hospital medical professionals about whether there are any follow up calls or appointments that are scheduled or need to be made. It can be a hectic time, so write down scheduled appointment information or offices you are responsible to contact
- Also talk to the medical staff about whether the older adult will need nurse visits, physical therapy, hospice visits, or any other kind of medical visits once he/she is discharged. If that has been arranged, get the information about the companies that will provide services and place it in the CareTeam Binder
- Think about how you will bring the older adult home. You may be able to bring the older adult home yourself. If not, then the hospital can assist you in arranging transportation for him/her

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in an ambulance or other vehicle. [CLICK HERE](#) to visit our Transportation CrossRoad for more information.

When the time comes that the older adult is actually released from the hospital, there will be a process which can be different in every hospital. Hospital staff should go over the process with you and the older adult, which may include any forms that need signatures. Make sure that you are there for the discharge discussion to ask any clarifying questions.

If you believe that the older adult is being discharged from the hospital too early or you question the safety of the discharge plan you can have the matter looked into and appeal the discharge if necessary. The appeals process varies depending on what type of insurance the older adult has. You can always discuss your concerns with medical professionals working with older adult before other measures are taken.

[CLICK HERE](#) to visit our Medicare section for more information.

[CLICK HERE](#) to visit our MassHealth section for more information.

[CLICK HERE](#) to visit our Veteran's Benefits section for more information.

If the older adult is fully insured by private health insurance (not self-insured), you will be required to file an internal grievance with the older adult's health insurance provider. If this does not resolve the problem the Office of Patient Protection in the Department of Public Health can help you request an external review of the decision. More information about the process and the older adult's rights is available on their website. [CLICK HERE](#) to visit the Health and Human Services External Review website for more information.

****Caregiver Hint:** *If you are in the hospital, you might not be well enough to plan your own discharge. If this happens, ask a friend or family member to work with the discharge planner at the hospital to arrange for your release. It is important to plan ahead as much as possible to help facilitate the discharge process. Do not be afraid to ask for help if you need it.*

Acute Illness Versus Chronic Illness

The older adult could be diagnosed with an acute illness or a chronic illness and understanding the difference can lead to a better understanding of the diagnosis.

- Acute Illness
An acute illness is one that begins rather suddenly and does not last longer than three months. Acute illnesses range in severity anywhere from the common cold to a cancer that is cured within three months. An illness can start out as acute, but if it is not cured within three months, it becomes a chronic illness.
- Chronic Illness
A chronic illness persists for a longer period of time; its duration can be anywhere from three months to a lifetime. Chronic illnesses range in severities as well. Some examples are: diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, asthma, arthritis, heart failure, and osteoporosis. Some chronic conditions may be curable, while others are not.

Different illnesses will require different kinds of treatment depending on the condition and the severity. It is vitally important that an illness be diagnosed by a medical professional. Sometimes the symptoms of various illnesses can be similar, so make sure to talk to a medical professional if the older adult is experiencing symptoms. The older adult can see a specialist about his/her condition who can provide a treatment plan. Often there are medications and treatments to manage the illness,

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but lifestyle changes may also improve the older adult's quality of life. It can be challenging for both you and the older adult to handle the routine required to manage an illness including limitations that may be placed on the older adult. Medical professionals can offer advice on successful approaches for managing the older adult's condition. It can also be difficult to deal with an illness emotionally. If you or the older adult are having trouble with this, speak to a medical professional about it. Therapy and support groups are available and can assist you and the older adult in coping with the medical condition.

If the older adult has an acute or chronic illness medical identification jewelry may be used in order to keep the older adult safe. Emergency medical professionals are trained to look for medical identification jewelry when responding to an emergency, so it could save the life of the older adult if medical conditions, illnesses, or special needs are engraved on jewelry. Examples of when medical identification jewelry should be worn include when the older adult has Alzheimer's Disease or a Related Dementias (ADRD), diabetes, a serious heart condition, serious allergies (especially to medications) and any other information that an emergency responder would need to know.

****Caregiver Hint:** *People of all ages suffer from acute and chronic illnesses. Understanding the difference is important to understand the illness better.*

Think about what would happen to the older adult that you are caring for if something were to happen to you. One way to do this is with caregiver medical identification jewelry. You may wear a medical ID bracelet or necklace that identifies you as a caregiver. It should also identify the older adult you are caring for, and give contact information for someone else who can help him/he in emergency situations.

Medical Treatments

When a diagnosis for a medical condition has been made, there are often medical treatments available either to cure the condition or address the symptoms. These treatments can range from physical therapy to surgery. Sometimes, there are multiple treatment options available for the patient. Medical professionals can advise you and the older adult about these options and which one(s) they recommend. Conditions may be treated aggressively or passively. Depending on the situation, a medical professional might recommend watchful waiting, which is when treatment is postponed and the disease is monitored regularly to see its progress. This is suggested when the condition may or may not develop into something that needs treatment. Sometimes, the recommended treatments for coexisting conditions conflict with each other. Take time to ask questions, discuss the options, and seek a second opinion if the suggestions being made are concerning.

Consider the following in regards to treatment options:

- All of the valid treatment options available for a specific diagnosis
- Side effects of medications and other treatments
- Effectiveness of different treatment methods
- Risks associated with treatment versus not treating the disease
- How long the condition will last with different treatment methods
- Where to find more information on the condition and treatment options

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****Caregiver Hint:** *This advice applies to any medical treatment, so use it when dealing with your own diagnoses as well. Identify someone you can trust to help you research and better understand diagnoses, treatments and tests.*

Some hospitals and other organizations offer classes about how to take care of someone with a specific condition. Ask if those are available for the older adult's or your own condition if you are interested in learning about care options. Sometimes the classes are specifically for the caregiver, but other times they involve the individual with the diagnosis.

Holistic Medicine

Holistic medicine is an approach to healing that includes alternative treatments such as acupuncture, chiropractics, Reiki and vital maze healing (also called meditation labyrinths). Commonly referred to as complimentary medicine, these treatments can be done in addition to traditional treatment methods. The philosophy behind holistic medicine is that the body, mind, and spirit are all connected and all three need to be cared for simultaneously in order to be healthy. Some holistic treatments may be covered by insurance. Holistic medicine may be central to the older adult's health care or used in addition to traditional medical practices. Discuss these treatment options with a medical professional. [CLICK HERE](#) for the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine website for more information.

****Caregiver Hint:** *Holistic medicine may offer ways to reduce the stress caused by your caregiving burden or help you care for your own mental and medical well-being.*

Medication Management

Proper medication management is an important part of maintaining good health. Many older adults take multiple medications daily, all with different instructions, which may cause confusion. The older adult may see multiple doctors, who each prescribe different medications. Make sure that there is a current list of all prescribed and over the counter medications in the CareTeam Binder and that each medical professional sees this list at every appointment. When the older adult is prescribed a new medication, make sure you and the older adult understand what it is for and how to take it properly. If there are questions talk to the older adult's medical providers or pharmacists. Some important information that you should know about all medications taken includes:

- The name of the medication
- What it looks like - color, shape and size. This can be helpful if you put the pills in some sort of dispenser or if the older adult has trouble reading the prescription labels
- The purpose of the medication (what is it treating and why the older adult needs it)
- The dosage of the medication
- When and how often to take the medication
- How to take the medication (before eating, after eating, with a glass of water, etc)
- Know exactly what the older adult should not be taking with the medication due to possible unwanted side effects (many medications are not to be taken with certain fruit juices or teas etc.)
- Any side effects associated with the medication
- The expiration date
- Who prescribed the medication (for refills or questions)

All of this information should be included in the CareTeam Binder so it is accessible if it is needed by you or the older adult. Most of this information can be found on the medication packaging.

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It is very important for the older adult's health that he/she takes all medications when and how the doctor prescribed. Missing doses, doubling up on doses, and taking doses at the wrong times can cause discomfort or health complications. There are a number of different ways to organize medications to help ensure that the older adult takes the correct medications at the correct time and in the correct dosage. How closely you monitor and assist the older adult with their medications depends on several factors including, their physical and mental capability, their willingness to comply and the number of medications they take daily. Some suggestions for medication management are:

- Use a pill box organizer. These plastic boxes have separate compartments for different days of the week or even different times of the day (morning, noon, evening, bedtime). They can be very helpful in making sure that the right pills are taken at the right time. Be sure to fill the boxes accurately and carefully
- You can also make a chart of the days of the week and when all medications need to be taken. You or the older adult can cross off medications once they have been taken
- There are medical alarm clocks and watches that can remind the older adult when it is time to take his/her medications
- There are automated pill dispensers that dispense medication at set times and use an alarm to remind the older adult to take them. Some can even be programmed to call the caregiver or another designated individual if a dose is missed

These products are available at local stores and pharmacies, through medical supply companies, and online. Many agencies, both public and private, offer these items at a discount. If the older adult is receiving any in-home services from an agency, ask if they provide any medication management supplies. Medications are very important to an older adult's health, so make sure that the method being used is successful so the older adult you are caring for takes his/her medications correctly.

Other things to think about with regards to medications:

- Ask a doctor or pharmacist about interactions between medications that the older adult is taking (including over the counter medications) and with food and drinks
- Ask about interactions with medications and alcohol. Unless the doctor or pharmacist says that it is safe to consume alcohol while on the medication, it is safer to assume that one should not
- Pay attention to any physical or mental changes after starting or stopping a medication. Write them down in the CareTeam Binder as they happen and mention them to a medical professional
- If the older adult makes changes to his/her lifestyle, such as a diet or exercise change, tell his/her doctor in case it alters the effectiveness of their medications
- If you or the older adult has a visual impairment, ask the pharmacist to print the label in large print
- If the childproof caps on prescription bottles are difficult to open, ask at the pharmacy for easy open caps (as long as there are no children in the house)
- Keep track of how many refills there are on the prescription and when the prescription will run out. Refill prescriptions ahead of time to prevent running out. Ask the pharmacy about automatic refills and reminders for prescriptions
- If the older adult needs to dispose of a medication that he/she no longer takes it should be:
 - Thrown away in its original container with the label colored over in black with the remaining medication mixed with water and kitty litter or coffee grounds
 - Disposed of at drug disposal days organized by the community
- If a medication is hard for the older adult to take ask the pharmacist if it comes in other forms. A common issue is that the pill is too large so the older adult may ask the pharmacists if the medication comes in a liquid form or can be crushed. Check with a medical professional before crushing any pills, as some are not designed to be crushed

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- Check with the older adult's health insurance company or pharmacy to see if prescriptions may be mailed directly to the older adult on a scheduled basis

Understanding medications and taking them the way that the doctor prescribes can be very challenging, but it is also extremely important. If either you or the older adult have any questions about medications or how to take them, make sure to ask a medical professional or pharmacist, to get the correct information.

****Caregiver Hint:** Everyone should be aware of important information about their own medication. Being organized helps you ensure that you're getting the most benefit out of your prescriptions. It may be confusing to keep track of your own medications while keeping track of the older adult's as well, so using these organizational tips for yourself may help.

Prescription Abbreviations

The instructions on prescription bottles are often written with abbreviations that can be hard to understand. Listed below are some common abbreviations for prescriptions. The older adult's medical professional and pharmacist can explain the instructions for any medication. Taking medications properly is extremely important and it is not possible unless the instructions are understood clearly. Ask questions if any parts of the instructions are not clear.

a.c.	before meals
ad lib.	freely, as needed
c (often with a line over it)	with
cap	capsule
DAW	dispense as written
D/C	discontinue
ea.	each
g	gram
gtt	drop
h.s.	at bedtime
IM	intramuscular
IV	intravenously
L	liter
mcg	Microgram
mEq	milliequivalent
mL	milliliter
NKA	no known allergy
NKDA	no known drug allergy
n.p.o.	nothing by mouth
oint	ointment
p.c.	after meals
p.o.	by mouth
p.r.n.	as needed
q.a.m.	every morning
q.d.	every day
q.h.	every hour
q.2.h.	every 2 hours
q.i.d.	four times a day
q.o.d.	every other day
q.s.	a sufficient quantity

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sol	solution
stat	immediately
tab	tablet
tbsp	tablespoon (15mL)
t.i.d.	three times a day
top	topically
tsp	teaspoon (5mL)
u.d.	as directed
wk	week

Making Prescriptions More Affordable

For those older adults who are struggling financially to afford their medications, there may be options for them to research.

For information and help with ways to make prescriptions affordable, feel free to contact Serving the Health Information Needs of Elders (S.H.I.N.E.) in Massachusetts at 1-800-AGE-INFO (1-800-243-4636) or 1-800-872-0166 TTY or MassMedLine-Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Services at 1-866-633-1617 (toll free), 508-373-0031, or 1-800-439-2370 TTY. [CLICK HERE](#) to visit our website for support groups and chats with S.H.I.N.E. and pharmacists from MassMedLine.

There may be generic drugs that can be used in place of their name brand counterparts at a significantly lower price. They contain the same active ingredients as the name brand and therefore will have the same therapeutic effect. Make sure that the older adult does not have any allergies to the active or inactive ingredients in the medication. According to the law, a pharmacist in Massachusetts is required to give the generic version of the drug if there is one available. The exception would be if the prescription from a doctor specifically says a brand name and “no substitution”. If the older adult is receiving a brand name medication it is either because there are no generic alternatives or because a doctor requested it. If the older adult is receiving the brand name drug because their doctor has requested it speak to his/her doctor about the possibility of switching to a generic.

Ask the older adult’s doctor(s) about samples of prescription medications. Sometimes doctors have free samples of prescriptions that they can give out, which can save money. You can also contact pharmaceutical companies directly to see if they have any assistance programs to get prescriptions at a reduced cost or even for free.

Prescription Advantage is a supplemental prescription insurance plan provided by the state of Massachusetts for older adults and individuals with disabilities who meet income eligibility requirements. Many people, with and without Medicare, are eligible for Prescription Advantage.

The Partnership of Prescription Assistance (PPA) is sponsored by private pharmaceutical companies to help individuals locate public and private programs to assist with the cost of medications. Each program has different eligibility requirements. For more information, [CLICK HERE](#) to visit Partnership For Prescription Assistance website.

Alzheimer’s Disease And Related Dementias(ADRD)

Dementia is a group of symptoms that affect mental functioning and social abilities. The symptoms are severe enough to interfere with daily activities. The possibility of developing dementia increases with age. There are many diseases that fall under the category of dementia including Alzheimer’s disease, Frontotemporal dementia (Pick’s disease), Lewy Body dementia, and Huntington’s disease. [CLICK HERE](#) to visit the Alzheimer’s Association’s website to learn more about the different types of dementia. These diseases can be especially difficult to deal with for both you and the older adult

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because they can affect memory, personality, behavior, and judgment. There are many underlying causes of dementia, some of which are treatable and/or curable. Some of these include vitamin or hormone deficiency, infections, depression, or medication interactions. However, there are many causes of dementia that are treatable but have no known cure. There are medications that can slow down the progression and decrease the symptoms. Because of this, it is important to look for signs of dementia and mention them to a doctor right away. While slight forgetfulness and confusion may be normal for some older adults, frequent lapses in memory and judgment may be signs of dementia. It is often friends and family who first notice the signs of dementia in an older adult. Only a medical professional can determine whether it is dementia and diagnose the specific cause. Together you can develop a treatment plan and coping strategies. There are many resources available to support those confronting Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias (ADRD) such as support groups, websites and books.

Some warning signs of ADRD are:

- Memory loss that affects every day life. Someone with dementia might repeat questions often and forget new information easily
- Struggling to carry out normal tasks. Someone with dementia might lose the ability to balance a checkbook or pay bills
- Difficulty remembering words and conversations
- Inability to solve problems that he/she would have been able to do before
- Confusion with place and time. Someone with dementia might not know what year it is or how they got to where they are
- Losing items and putting things away in strange places
- Lack of judgment and poor decision making
- Changes in personality, behavior, and mood. Someone with dementia might be suspicious of loved ones, anger easily, or be agitated
- Disinterest in activities or hobbies that he/she previously enjoyed

If the older adult shows any of these signs or symptoms, talk to a medical professional. Do not assume that the older adult has ADRD before getting a professional diagnosis. Because these signs and symptoms may also indicate a treatable condition, such as diabetes, consulting a physician immediately is important. A medical professional can determine if the older adult has ADRD or another condition and suggest treatments and advice. For many dementias there are no known cures but there are some prescription medications that can improve the older adult's quality of life as well as some lifestyle changes that can make living with the disease easier. There are many specialized programs devoted to providing care for people with ADRD including long term care facilities and adult day care centers. Utilizing these specialized facilities is another way to ensure that the older adult is receiving excellent care. [CLICK HERE](#) to visit our Respite CrossRoad for more information. [CLICK HERE](#) to visit our Housing CrossRoad for more information.

Being a caregiver for an older adult with ADRD can be especially difficult because of the memory loss, confusion, and changes in personality associated with the disease. Some tips for caring for an older adult with ADRD are:

- Try to be patient and understanding with the older adult. Although it can be frustrating and tiring for you, it is also very difficult for the older adult. It is not the older adult's fault that this is happening. He/She may not even understand what is going on. It is important to not become angry or upset if the older adult forgets who you are or is moody, as this is part of the disease
- Be flexible. As the disease progresses, you may have to change aspects of your care plan including who the members of the CareTeam are, what your responsibilities are, and how you care for the older adult
- Ask for help. This cannot be emphasized enough. Look into the resources that are available to help you including family, friends, CareTeam members and community programs

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- Encourage the older adult to perform tasks he/she is capable of. But if tasks are too difficult, provide assistance needed to help reduce frustration
- If the older adult begins to wander, look into resources to ensure their safety. This may include using a medical bracelet that has his/her name, medical condition, and address engraved on it or making adjustments to the home, like adding an alarm system to alert you if the older adult tries to leave
- Try to find a routine that works for you and the older adult. Some times of the day, especially later in the day, can be more difficult for a person with ADRD. This is often referred to as “sundowning.” Planning difficult activities earlier in the day can help the older adult focus and become less frustrated
- Use simple words and short sentences if the older adult has trouble understanding what you are saying
- Minimize environmental distractions such as noise and clutter. The older adult may focus better on a conversation if there are fewer distractions, like a radio playing
- If it becomes too difficult for you to care for the older adult or you cannot be with him/her at all times, consider taking a break by utilizing a variety of supportive resources or a different living situation with more support. [CLICK HERE](#) to visit our Respite CrossRoad for more information. [CLICK HERE](#) to visit our Housing CrossRoad for more information

ADRD can be very hard on everyone involved. As the older adult loses abilities or has changes in personality, it can be extremely frustrating for the older adult, the caregiver, friends and family. Remember that it is okay to grieve all losses, not just death. When the older adult is affected by a form of dementia you might grieve the loss of your old relationship, loss of abilities, changes in personality, and the loss of memory. Grieving losses along the way can be a helpful. [CLICK HERE](#) to visit The Alzheimer’s Association website for more information.

****Caregiver Hint:** *ADRD affects many older adults and some younger adults which could include you. Pay attention to your own health and if you think that you are developing symptoms of dementia, check with a medical professional. These symptoms that are concerning you may be the result of your caregiving burdens and resulting stress or could be something more serious. Take care of yourself. If you are having memory problems that prevent you from taking care of yourself or the older adult, it is important to find another source of care.*

Substance Abuse

Substance abuse is very dangerous to a person’s physical and mental health. Substance abuse is when an individual abuses alcohol, prescription drugs, and/or nonprescription drugs. This can lead to addiction, which often has permanent negative effects on a person. Drugs and alcohol affect an older adult differently than a younger person and the dangerous effects of abusing substances increases with age. Substance abuse can lead to and result from a mental illness. [CLICK HERE](#) to visit our Mental Well-Being CrossRoad for more information.

There are many different ways to treat a substance abuse problem including inpatient care, outpatient care, and support groups. There is a broad spectrum of organizations that help individuals who are substance abusers or addicts. Treatments for substance abuse vary significantly because there is no single agreed upon cause of substance abuse. Some of the common views of its cause include genetics, chemicals and the environment. Some treatments are based more on biological science and the use of medications while others are based on psychology and counseling. Each person with a substance abuse problem needs to choose a treatment plan and professionals that he/she is compatible with. For some people, a combination of treatment methods works best. Finding the right

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treatment might take time and patience, but the process of choosing the best treatment for an individual is important. Someone seeking treatment for a substance abuse problem has to be honest and ready to address the problem in order for a medical professional or a group to be able to help. Substance abuse is a disease and not something to be hidden and ashamed of.

There are many support groups available to individuals who abuse substances, as well as their friends and families. Some examples are Alcoholics Anonymous, an organization that holds regular support group meetings in many different locations for individuals who abuse alcohol; Al-Anon, an organization for friends and family affected by individuals who abuse alcohol; and Narcotics Anonymous, an organization for individuals addicted to narcotic drugs.

Substance Abuse By The Caregiver

The burden of caregiving and the stress caused by this responsibility can lead to substance abuse. A caregiver who is abusing substances cannot fulfill his/her caregiving job to the fullest. Substance abuse has a negative impact physically and mentally on both the caregiver and the older adult and may lead to abuse of the older adult. [CLICK HERE](#) to visit our Personal & Home Safety CrossRoad for more information on elder abuse. Substance abuse is a serious problem that is not uncommon among caregivers. If you have a history of substance abuse or addiction, the stress of caregiving can cause you to relapse. If you are an older adult yourself, the way that drugs affect you will be stronger than it used to be, so substance use/abuse can be more dangerous. If you or someone who cares about you notices substance abuse or suspects an addiction, talk to a medical professional or join a support group.

Substance Abuse By The Older Adult

Substance abuse is a dangerous problem among older adults. Alcohol and drugs, both prescription and nonprescription, can have a stronger effect on older people. As a person ages, his/her body is slower to process alcohol and drugs, meaning the amount that his/her body can handle is lower. For example, this could mean that the amount of alcohol a person used to be able to drink safely might have a much stronger effect on him/her later in life. The age at which alcohol and drugs begin to affect someone more strongly depends on that person's health including his/her physical, mental, and nutritional status.

The length of time that the older adult has been abusing substances can make a difference. For example, someone who has been abusing alcohol for years and has cirrhosis will remain intoxicated longer than someone without cirrhosis who drank the same amount. Also, drug and alcohol use/abuse can have dangerous interactions with prescription medications. There is an increased risk of falls and injury among older adults abusing drugs and alcohol in part because of the heightened effects of the drugs and alcohol but also because of general problems with balance. [CLICK HERE](#) to visit our Personal & Home Safety CrossRoad for more information on falls. The toll that drug and alcohol abuse takes on older adults is greater than on younger adults, so addressing the issue is crucial.

If the older adult has a history of substance abuse or addiction, even if he/she has been sober for a long time, the stress of aging, death of a significant other, a new diagnoses and/or the loss of independence and abilities may cause a relapse. He/she may try to hide it from other people, so it can be difficult to detect. It can easily go unnoticed by the older adult's medical providers, so if anyone on the CareTeam believes there could be a problem, it is important that they bring it to the attention of others. Sometimes, the effects of substance abuse on the older adult can seem like the symptoms of another illness. For example, confusion and memory loss caused by prescription drug abuse may seem like dementia. Try not to jump to conclusions about diagnoses without consulting a medical professional. It is important to pay attention. If you think the older adult is abusing any substances, legal or not, speak with a medical professional. Just because he/she is older does not mean that the problem should be ignored. There are treatments available to any person with a

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substance abuse problem or addiction no matter how old the person is or how long he/she has had the problem. Age should not stop anyone from seeking help.

Substance Abuse By Another Member Of The CareTeam

There are typically many members on the CareTeam, any of whom may be struggling with substance abuse or an addiction. Anyone on the team, including medical professionals, home health aides and family members, can have substance abuse problems which can negatively affect the care that the older adult receives. If the person suspected to have a substance abuse problem is a professional, including medical professionals, home health aides and drivers, you should report the abuse to his/her supervisor and a replacement should be found. If it is another member of the CareTeam who is a friend or family member, speak to him/her about the problem and try to assist him/her in finding help. If this person is a danger to the safety, physical or emotional health of the older adult, he/she should not be permitted to help with the older adult's care until treatment is received and substances are no longer being abused.

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