When Seniors Say "No!"

A guide for overcoming resistance to assistance

Home Instead SENIOR CARE®

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Growing older, making choices

In Australia, an older person is faced with many choices – choices such as where and how to live as they age. While many seniors will actively choose to continue residing in the comfort of their own home, many others will put off decisions until a crisis emerges. The desire to remain independent and maintain their quality of life is often at the heart of these decisions with over 90% of seniors wishing to remain in their own home.

However, the reality is that growing older means:

- Everyday tasks may become more and more difficult
- Increased frailty and safety risks
- Increased stress on family members worried about the health and safety of their older relative and not being available to help them.

Despite this, many seniors will firmly resist offers of help. They are the primary decision makers about their needs but asking for help is not easy for many of them. However, if clear choices about how to stay at home and get help become the subjects of everyday conversation, the benefits of remaining healthy and independent can be enjoyed by all the family members of an ageing person.

Perhaps you are an older person who is living at home thinking maybe you might need a little extra help from time to time?

Or perhaps you are caring for an older relative or friend who is determined to stay living in their own home?

The choice to stay at home needs to be supported by many other decisions such as how to stay active, how to exercise both the mind and body, how to maintain a healthy, well balanced diet and planning how these things will be achieved.

It's important to plan for whom and what will help you to maintain your independence.

CONSUMER DIRECTED CARE

In August 2013, the Australian Government introduced Consumer Directed Care (CDC) – a new way of funding Home Care Packages. CDC provides older people and their families with greater choice, control and flexibility of home care services. Choice over the type of services and care they receive, choice over who provides their care and choice over when they receive their home care services. CDC will be in full effect by July 2015. For more information on CDC, request a copy of Home Instead Senior Care's The Home Care Solution guide or visit www.homeinstead.com.au/resources.

* Research references in this booklet are taken from studies conducted by Home Instead Senior Care in Australian and international markets.

Help (not) wanted

More than half (52%) of family members presently caring for an older relative started doing so because the senior relative had an injury, illness or medical condition that left them less able to function independently. However, there are other issues, such as depression, poor nutrition, isolation, loneliness or the death of a spouse that can further compromise an older person's physical and mental health in just a short period of time.

Many seniors will refuse help let alone ask for it. Often they fear becoming a burden to their families or losing their independence. So, it is important that their caregivers, adult children or other family members look for signs that may indicate some assistance is required in their loved one's everyday lives.

So how can you tell if your senior loved one needs some extra help? Home Instead Senior Care has compiled some tips and ideas to help you overcome resistance to in-home care and support.

Wondering if you might be overreacting?

The 10 most common situations prompting family members to provide a senior with additional assistance:

1. An injury, illness or medical condition left the senior less able to function independently.
2. Advanced age made the senior less able to function independently.
3. The family noticed the senior was becoming burdened by everyday tasks.
4. The senior person asked for help directly.
5. The family member would feel guilty if they didn't offer to help out.
6. The senior needed more assistance after the death of a spouse or partner.
7. The senior would have had to move or leave their home if some assistance was not provided.
8. The family noticed the senior was losing interest in some of the activities they used to enjoy.
9. Family members noticed the senior was losing weight.
10. Family members noticed the senior's appearance was deteriorating.

Warning bells: 10 signs a senior needs help

Unpaid bills piling up

Seniors can feel overwhelmed by the simple task of opening and responding to daily mail, particularly if their eye sight is deteriorating or if this was once the responsibility of a now deceased spouse. This can result in overdue bills, bounced cheques and potential utility disconnection due to lack of payment and other creditor issues.

Reluctance to leave the house

Rather than ask for help, seniors who are having trouble, e.g. walking, remembering directions, seeing or hearing, will slowly pull away from their community and friends and isolate themselves. If left unresolved, this isolation can lead to loneliness and depression, as well as malnutrition and other health issues.

Losing interest in preparing or eating meals

Seniors who suddenly find themselves alone, who have become lonely over time or are easily overwhelmed by cooking, tend not to eat properly. Signs that poor eating habits are forming include improper selection of food in the house (not well-balanced), expired or rotten food in the refrigerator or signs of excessive weight loss (clothes much looser). An ageing person may eat enough calories to get by, but may suffer nutritionally from increased cholesterol or low vitamin intake.

Declining personal hygiene

Changes in appearance are the most obvious sign that some assistance is needed. These signs can range from unkept hair and body odour, to unshaven faces, wearing clothes that are dirty, unchanged for days or inappropriate for the weather. These changes may occur because doing the laundry or getting in and out of the shower has become too physically challenging. Many who live alone also fear slipping and falling in a shower or bath with no one to help him or her get up.

Declining driving skills

Look for evidence of parking or speeding tickets, dents and scratches on the senior's car – these may be signs of deteriorating driving skills. Decreased ability to see, poor sense of direction, inability to merge in traffic, driving way under the speed limit and very slow reaction times may indicate help is needed.

Signs of burnt pots and pans

This may be a sign of short-term memory loss or even the onset of Alzheimer's disease, as pots used in cooking have been forgotten on the stove and burn. Besides the danger of falls, fire is probably one of the greatest safety concerns families of older relatives face.

Symptoms of depression

Depression causes marked changes in behaviour and one's daily routine over time. Many seniors feel isolated or like prisoners in their own home, particularly if a health condition or the death of friends or family members keeps them from going to the places they once enjoyed. Feelings of hopelessness or despair, increased listlessness and not wanting to get dressed can all be indications of a problem. Other signs include decreased visits with family members and friends, a change in sleeping patterns (sleeping for long periods or not sleeping at all) and lack of interest in usual hobbies and activities.

Missed doctors' appointments and social engagements

While this can be a symptom of increased forgetfulness, it is often simply a result of not having transportation and not knowing how to access transportation options available to them.

Untidy house

Changes in housekeeping may occur simply because it is too difficult or tiring. This is especially troubling if a parent used to keep the house neat and orderly or if a late spouse was responsible for these duties. From dirty laundry to dirty dishes, these everyday tasks can become too much to handle on their own.

Losing track of medications

Missed doses and medication mistakes (overdosing and running out of pills before the next prescription can be refilled) can lead to serious medical complications. Some seniors take multiple prescriptions, which can be overwhelming without assistance and reminders.

Overcoming resistance to assistance

Many seniors do not ask for help and refuse to acknowledge they need assistance – they fear they will be a burden to their families or lose their independence.

The following six strategies can help you to overcome your senior's resistance to care:

1. Understand where the resistance is coming from

Ask your parent or loved one why he or she is resisting. "Mum, I notice that every time I bring up the idea of someone coming in to help, you resist it. Why is that?" Often older adults don't realise they are being resistant.

2. Explain your goals

Remind your loved one that you both want the same thing. Explain that a little extra help can keep them at home longer and will help put your mind at ease as well. Have a candid conversation with them about the impact this care is having on your life. Often seniors don't understand the time commitment of a caregiver. If a family member is stretched thin with their caregiving duties, sometimes he or she just needs to ask the senior to do things to make his/her life easier as a favour, such as having an additional caregiver step in to help out. Use the phrase, "I would feel so much better if I knew that you had more help, someone to do your food shopping, someone to take you to the chemist, someone to be here when I can't, etc…"

3. Bring in outside help

If a relationship with a parent is deteriorating, ask a professional, such as an aged care professional, for an assessment. A third-party professional can provide valuable input. You can visit homeinstead.com.au/resources for tips on how to talk with a loved one. If you are having problems getting through to your older adult, consider asking another family member or close friend to intervene. If you're not making headway, perhaps there's someone better to talk with them.

4. Research your options

Research all available in-home care and support services options to find the best, most suitable assistance for your loved one. If you decide outside help is needed, reassure your loved one and let them know you have researched all of the options available to them and you are confident you have found the best caregiver you can find to come into the home to help them.

5. A helping hand to stay at home

Explain how a little bit of assistance will make it possible to remain living independently in their own home for longer. Most professional caregiving services provide a free consultation to assess a senior's specific situation and make recommendations for what services they could benefit from. If your senior continues to show signs of problems, (e.g. burning pots, missing doses of important medication or falling at home) use these events as a time to discuss their safety and your concerns over their wellbeing and suggest additional assistance options to keep them safe and independent at home.

6. Respect their decisions

Sometimes you won't agree with their decisions – that's O.K. As long as your loved one is of sound mind, he or she should have the final say. Involve them in the planning of their care. Don't make unilateral decisions unless they no longer have the mental capacity (e.g. Alzheimer's) to participate in his/her own life choices. If they are still resistant, but a danger to himself/herself, consult a lawyer about taking steps towards becoming a guardian and enduring power of attorney so that, when the time comes, you can make decisions on their behalf when they are incapable of doing so themselves.

A note: If your senior has dementia, seek professional assistance from a doctor or aged care professional. Reasoned discussion will not work and other strategies must be employed.

Help yourself so you can help them

"I am trying to help Mum on my own. I think I'm doing a good job and I don't want to burden anyone else with this, but seriously, there are times when I could really use some help…"

Often caregiving is a family responsibility. But sometimes if a spouse is not present or able to be the caregiver, the primary caregiving responsibilities, for one or both parents, tends to fall on just one family member (usually the eldest, adult daughter or the adult child that lives the closest to the senior).

The number of people providing care in Australia is staggering. In 2012 there were 2.7 million unpaid carers in Australia, representing 13.1% of the population. Two thirds (67%) of primary carers who did not live in the same household as the main recipient of care were caring for a parent.

According to a Home Instead Senior Care survey many carers (72%) provide the care without any outside help. However, 31% admit they'd like more help with caregiving, and one in four resent other family members who don't help out.

If you are a sole caregiver it's important you avoid burning out. You must take care of your health or you won't be any good to the person for whom you are providing care. One of the best ways to avoid becoming overstressed is to enlist the help of other family members, friends and support services. You should do so without feeling bad or guilty for reaching out.

Lighten your load

As a family caregiver, you play a vitally important role in the life of your ageing loved one - a role that can also be overwhelming, exhausting and sometimes thankless.

Lighten your load by involving other family members or close friends or reaching out for caregiver support.

Certainly some of these situations are more difficult than others. But reaching out to others can make your senior's life easier and lessen your stress.

Give each person a responsibility

Even if it is small, share some of the responsibility to help spread the caregiver workload. Even if your brother lives 1,000 kilometres away, make it his responsibility to call your parent once a week to check in or to visit for a week each year to allow you to take your own family holiday.

Divide up the tasks

Have a specific family member who handles the medical aspects of your relative's care (talks with doctors, medication information, etc.), while another may be responsible for groceries/meals and another handles paying the bills. By dividing up the tasks, each person becomes more involved with the details or these tasks and can keep each other abreast of changes, issues, problems, etc.

Communicate with other family members

If you don't express your concerns about your loved one (e.g. debilitating health, amount of time you are spending caring for them, etc.) you can't expect your other family members to know what you are thinking and feeling.

Don't be a control freak

If you want to control every aspect of the care, other family members may be less likely to step in, thinking you have it all under control. They'll be less able to understand your stress levels if they believe you are creating it yourself.

Get support

If you don't have other family members to help out, consider joining a local caregiver support group or involving outside friends, church members or professional caregivers to share the duties.

For other tips on how to manage caregiver stress visit: carersaustralia.com.au and caregiverstress.com

Next steps

When seniors say "Yes!"

When seniors decide to seek and accept support and assistance to continue living independently at home, the pathway to finding home care can be confusing and stressful to navigate.

It is important that you obtain quality information and advice so that you can consider all support and assistance available to you and find the best option for your individual needs. Depending on your circumstances there will be a number of options available to you.

Home Instead Senior Care's Home Care Solution guide can help you understand and identify the best home care solution for you.

Talk to your local Home Instead Senior Care office; they can discuss your needs with you, guide, advise and provide you with information and resources about the range of different care options within the community. They will also be able to explain the range of services provided by Home instead Senior Care which can be implemented immediately without assessment.

For more information visit www.homeinstead.com.au

Home Instead Senior Care is a specialist, national provider of high quality in-home care for older people.

We help with a range of personal and lifestyle needs while providing welcome companionship.

Our services include assistance with personal care, light household duties, meal preparation, medication reminders, transport to appointments, shopping and social outings. We take personal responsibility for providing the best in-home care and support to meet our clients' needs and are committed to addressing the individual and national challenges of Australia's ageing population.

Established in 1994 in the United States, Home Instead now operates in 17 countries through a network of 1,000 offices.

In Australia, Home Instead operates in every mainland State, sharing resources and support across State borders. We employ and train our CAREGivers to understand the challenges facing people as they get older and provide specialised care through our unique training program to support the needs of clients with dementia.

We understand that to you, it's about finding trustworthy care for your ageing loved one. To us, it's about providing the highest quality, in-home care services to fit you and your family's needs.

Contact us for a free no-obligation consultation where we can discuss the needs of your loved one and provide you with information and advice to help you and your family find the right care solution. Contact your nearest Home Instead office by visiting www.homeinstead.com.au.

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