

Caring for an Older Person at Home

Practical basics for the family

THE FOUR THINGS THAT MATTER MOST

- 1. Keep them moving.** Every day in bed costs muscle that takes a week to regain. Even sitting out in a chair, or walking to the toilet, is far better than lying in.
- 2. Prevent falls.** See the falls sheet — the bathroom, loose mats and poor lighting are the main culprits.
- 3. Watch food and fluid.** Older people feel thirst poorly and often eat too little protein.
- 4. Review the medicines.** The more tablets, the more falls and confusion.

Eating and drinking

- Offer **small, frequent meals** with **protein at each** — milk, curd, dal, egg, paneer, fish.
- **Encourage fluids through the day**, and offer them — do not wait to be asked. Dehydration in the elderly causes confusion, falls and kidney problems.
- Check they can **chew comfortably**. Ill-fitting dentures are a common hidden cause of poor eating and weight loss.
- Watch for coughing during meals — it may mean food is going the wrong way, and needs assessment.
- Ensure adequate **calcium, vitamin D and sunlight**.

SUDDEN CONFUSION IS A MEDICAL EMERGENCY, NOT "JUST OLD AGE"

If a previously alert older person becomes suddenly confused, drowsy or agitated over hours or days, look for a cause — **urine infection, chest infection, dehydration, constipation, a new medicine, pain, or a fall with a head injury**.

Bring them in. Treated early, most of this reverses completely.

Other things to keep an eye on

- **Bowels and bladder** — constipation is very common and causes pain, confusion and loss of appetite. Fluids, fibre and movement first.
- **Eyes, ears and teeth** — check yearly. Poor vision causes falls; poor hearing causes withdrawal and is often mistaken for dementia.
- **Skin and feet** — inspect regularly, keep nails cut, moisturise dry skin.
- **Mood and company.** Loneliness and low mood are common and treatable. Keep them involved in family life, conversation and decisions.
- **Bring all medicines to every appointment** and ask us to review whether each is still needed.

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