

Update: Living Independently



Proactive Living for Seniors

Living independently with dignity, including continuing to enjoy as many normal activities as possible, is one of the primary goals of many older adults. Today many seniors can live on their own for much longer, a trend called “aging in place.” There are several keys for seniors successfully maintaining independence: planning, setting goals, sharing them with loved ones, managing personal health, and consulting physicians and other caregivers for ideas and plans to accomplish personal goals. Having a plan for aging in place and knowing your health risks and financial options can make it easier to continue to live independently, whether at home or in a senior living facility.

One of the most important factors in maintaining an independent lifestyle is education about the aging process. This includes a frank discussion about the normal parts of the aging process and how to adjust lifestyles to accommodate those changes.

For those who would like to age in place, changes in health and general well-being are often a source of great concern. Sometimes older adults are fearful that asking for support may make them seem incapable of living independently. Really the opposite is true: recognizing where they need support and proactively putting resources in place will help them maintain independence. Proactive health management can help keep you healthier longer.

Elderly adults and their caregivers need to keep in mind that it is okay to ask for help. Neighbors, children, grandchildren, friends, church members, professional health care advisors and community service providers can lend a hand. Once you have assessed your situation and support needs, explore your options and find the help you need to age in place.

Tips for Maintaining a Proactive Lifestyle

Maintaining physical health

- Follow a healthy lifestyle – eat a balanced diet, including fresh foods and water.
- Manage your health conditions – take medicine as prescribed, monitor stability and mobility regularly, and visit your health providers periodically to check progress.
- Exercise and stay active.

Avoiding isolation

- Participate in your favorite activities and seek out new hobbies.
- Stay connected to family and friends and make new friends.
- Get out of your house or apartment if you are able – to a senior center, a church or place of worship, or out with friends.
- Have a purpose for waking up each morning, whether it's volunteering, a hobby, or your loved ones.

Resources

Living independently

National Aging in Place Council

www.naipc.org

National Institute on Aging: There's No Place Like Home - For Growing Old

www.niapublications.org/tipsheets/home.asp

Living safely and avoiding falls

Consumer Product Safety Commission: Safety for Older Consumers Home Safety Checklist

www.cpsc.gov/CPSCPUB/PUBS/701.html

Maintaining good nutrition and fitness

MedLine Plus: Nutrition for Seniors

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/nutritionforseniors.html

To find a registered dietician in your area, call the American Dietetic Association at 1-800-366-1655 or visit www.eatright.org

Improving family communications

Family Caregiver Alliance: Holding a Family Meeting

www.caregiver.org/caregiver/jsp/content_node.jsp?nodeid=475

Understanding alternative and continuing care living choices

Administration on Aging: Elders & Families – Housing Resource

www.aoa.gov/eldfam/Housing/Housing.asp

American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging: Consumer Information

www.aahsa.org/consumer_info/default.asp

About My Health Care Manager

My Health Care Manager helps older adults and their families understand and navigate the health issues and complex decisions associated with aging. For more information, contact My Health Care Manager, 8520 Allison Pointe Blvd., Suite 230, Indianapolis, IN 46250, 317-598-8921 or 800-499-8020 or visit us on the Web at www.MyHealthCareManager.com.

Numerous Options Can Help You Continue to Live Independently

Asking for help isn't always easy, and it might feel contrary to a goal of remaining independent. But getting needed support services can help seniors live on their own longer, and help is surprisingly accessible. You can get almost any type of assistance you want in your home, sometimes from paid services, other times for free. The following list from the National Institute on Aging includes common help seniors need. You can find information on many services from your local Area Agency on Aging, local and state offices on aging, social services, or senior centers. And friends, relatives, and churches, along with eldercare services like My Health Care Manager, can provide valuable support.

Personal care. A caregiver, relative or friend can help you bathe or wash your hair, or you could hire someone to help you for a short time each day.

Homemaking. Some grocery stores and drug stores will take orders over the phone or internet and deliver items to your home. You can hire a cleaning service or housekeeper – some will even help with laundry. Some dry cleaners will pick up and deliver your clothes. A neighbor or family member might be able to help with yard work or errands, or you could hire a teenager in your neighborhood.

Meals. Share cooking with a friend, have a potluck dinner, or dine out for a chance to visit with others. Meals are sometimes served at senior centers, churches, or synagogues. Friends, neighbors and church groups are often willing to make meals for seniors, and programs like Meals on Wheels bring hot meals to your home.

Money management. Ask a trusted relative to lend a hand if you need support with bill paying or health insurance management, or find a volunteer, financial counselor, or geriatric care manager through your local Area Agency on Aging. Regular bills like utilities and rent/mortgage can be paid directly from your checking account – your bank can arrange it.

Health care. There are devices available to remind you when it is time to take your medicines. If you need nursing care at home for a short time, Medicare might pay for a home health aide.

Getting around. If you have trouble walking, consider an electric chair or scooter, potentially covered by Medicare. A relative, friend, or neighbor could take you along when they run errands or do yours for you. Volunteer services may be available to take you shopping or to doctor's appointments. And free or low-priced public transportation might be available in your community.

Activities and friends. A local senior center or YMCA might offer activities for seniors. If it is hard for you to leave your home, volunteers are sometimes available to stop by or call once a week to keep you company.

Care away from home. If you live with a caregiver who works during the day, adult day services outside the home are sometimes available. There are also facilities that can provide temporary respite care.

Housing. Does your home require changes to make it easier and safer to live in? A ramp at the front door, grab bars in the tub or shower, nonskid floors, more comfortable handles on doors or faucets, and better insulation can extend the time you can live at home. Check with your local or State Area Agency on Aging or state housing finance agency if you need help paying for these changes.

Products to make life easier. There are products to make many daily activities easier – turning doorknobs, getting out of a chair, putting on your socks. The Department of Education offers information on more than 30,000 products designed to make it easier for people with physical limitations to do things for themselves.

Safety. If you live alone and fear becoming sick or injured with no one around to help, invest in an emergency alert system for a monthly fee. Push a special button that you wear and emergency medical personnel will be called. If you worry about crime in your neighborhood, physical abuse, or losing money in a scam, talk to your local Area Agency on Aging.

'A Story of Proactive Independence: Sarah Brown'

A My Health Care Manager Story

Memory issues challenged Sarah Brown. She was embarrassed and scared by her forgetfulness and began to isolate herself in her independent living apartment. Because this was so unlike her, concerned family members thought moving to an assisted living facility would help Sarah become active again.

Her family quickly decided that assisted living was not the answer, but they weren't aware of their alternatives. An assessment by a Health Care Manager focused on Sarah's living situation and on developing a plan that identified and addressed her issues, gave ideas for including the support she needed and the specific activities she enjoyed. My Health Care Manager helped Sarah's family evaluate her choices in living arrangements and they decided she would remain in her apartment with minimal support services.

Her Health Care Manager identified a qualified companion to spend days with her, and visited weekly to monitor the situation and keep her family well informed. The living community staff and Sarah's family and friends were coached on how to handle her forgetfulness so she would feel more comfortable.

By proactively addressing their concerns, Sarah's family remains comfortable with her continued independence. More importantly, Sarah has experienced a great deal of satisfaction knowing that she is capable of maintaining her independent lifestyle.