

May 2021

Boomers, Elders, and More E-Newsletter

Monthly Elder Care Newsletter of the Vanderbilt Child & Family Center



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Child and Family Center

A Message from the Wellbeing Manager

Imagine being suddenly assigned to an unpaid job you do not feel trained for, but someone else's survival depends on your performance. If you are a caregiver, you may feel this way.

Being a caregiver can be stressful. You do not have time to learn every aspect of the job, you are always on the job, and you have few opportunities to consult with other people who could help. Caregiving can be an isolating job and being physically present for your loved one at all times can make you feel trapped in your home. But it is important to find a way to combat isolation and get support.

Pushing back against the isolation of caregiving is paramount for a caregiver. Caregivers need positive interaction. Caregivers fail to help themselves when pushing back against isolation, choosing to hang around unhealthy individuals who bring you down emotionally.

When you become isolated, your dark thoughts take you down – often quickly. To best fight that, caregivers need to surround themselves with healthy, positive individuals. Regular phone and face-to-face encounters serve as the path towards pushing back against isolation.

You may have to start slow, and not pin all your hopes on one individual, one phone call, or one encounter. A phone call, a letter, a lunch....all of these things represent a simple, but powerful way to offer interaction.

Without positive human connections, caregivers suffer. Family caregivers need to remain engaged in the community and their social networks. Since caregivers can often feel lonely in a crowded room, it is important not only to be present but also to engage.

Full Article: [Caregivers: How and Why to Avoid Isolation | Seniors Guide](#) and [Caregivers and the Struggle against Isolation \(standingwithhope.com\)](#)

“Don't forget that you're human.
It's okay to have a meltdown.
Just don't unpack and live there.
Cry it out and then refocus on
where you are headed.”

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Reap the Benefits of Nature This Spring

By: Josh Friesen (Generations Home Care)

Spring and early summer is a great time to start spending more time outside. Even though COVID-19 and social-distancing guidelines make going outside more challenging, the health benefits of doing so are undeniable. By taking the right precautions, like wearing a face mask, avoiding crowds, and maintaining proper distancing, you can reduce your risk and reap all the rewards nature has to offer.

Nature Is An Important Restorative

Research shows that outdoor activities offer many benefits, even when compared to other methods of stress reduction. In one study, a group that went for a nature walk scored higher on a concentration test than those who simply relaxed. Time spent in nature can help bolster and restore short-term memory and attention, reduce stress, and improve creativity.

Mental health is often not treated with the importance it deserves, especially for the elderly. On top of benefiting mental acuity, spending time outside in nature has also been shown to have a positive effect on anxiety and depression. This is certainly something we can all benefit from in these unusually stressful times.

Though being out in nature has been shown to offer more benefits than walking on a city street, you don't have to trek to the nearest national park to capitalize on them. In one study, people experienced an increase in concentration simply by looking at a picture of nature.

Sunlight Offers Many Benefits

The reason people are happier spending time outside comes down to a number of factors, and natural light is one of them. Light has been proven to increase mood; in one study, patients on the sunnier side of the hospital took 22 percent less analgesic medication than those on the side with less light. They also reported lower stress and less pain.

Spending time outside can be a good way to supplement vitamin D levels. People over 65 produce a fourth of the vitamin D as people in their 20s. Being out in the sun can help replenish these levels. Although sunscreen blocks the type of UV light which causes sunburns, this same light is also what generates vitamin D in the skin. Walks with intermittent sun exposure can offer the best of both worlds.

Being Outdoors Can Help You Heal

The mental benefits of being outside might seem obvious, but more surprising are the physical effects. As mentioned above, sunlight's benefit to pain might be as a result of psychological factors. However, a reduction of pain, stress, and negativity can help wounds heal more effectively.

Time spent in nature also reduces inflammation, and some studies have suggested a positive correlation between being outside and improved immune functioning. The presence of nearby green spaces increases the general health of residents, and the elderly are one group who gain even more benefit.

Overall, the physical health benefits nature offers are likely a result of many factors. But, reducing stress and improving your mental outlook can have an enormous benefit on physical health as a result.

There are Many Ways to Get Outside

There are many ways to reap the rewards of being outside. Getting to a nearby park or nature area and taking a long walk is a great way to soak in nature's benefits. However, for those with less ability to travel, there can be many options in your own backyard – sometimes even literally.

A walk in a city park or time spent sitting in a small wooded grove can offer some of the same benefits as a more in-depth immersion in a natural setting. But not all of us are lucky enough to live with a pleasant green space nearby. If you have a yard, gardening is a great way to spend time in a natural setting. It can also offer several other benefits from improved self-esteem to hand strength; and in time, a crop of healthy vegetables to put on the table.

Even in small doses, nature can be a powerful tool for wellness. For those with mobility issues, sitting outside and getting some partial sunlight can also have a positive effect.

Full Article: [Reap the Benefits of Nature This Spring | Generations Home Care \(homecaregenerations.com\)](https://www.generationshomecare.com/blog/reap-the-benefits-of-nature-this-spring)

How to Start a Conversation About End-of-Life Care

By: Amy Goyer and Andy Markowitz, AARP

Dying is a universal experience. Nearly everyone has a story about a good death or a hard death among those they love. The difference between these experiences may rest on whether we have shared our wishes for how we want to spend out final days.

How we want to die is the most important and costly conversation Americans aren't having. Consider these facts:

- Ninety-two percent of people think it is important to talk about end-of-life wishes with their loved ones, but only 32 percent have done so, according to a 2018 survey by the Conversation Project.
- One in 5 said they've avoided the subject out of worry about upsetting their loved ones.
- Ninety-six percent of people 65 and older consider it important to put in writing their wishes for medical care in case of serious illness, but only a quarter have shared such a document with a doctor, a 2017 Kaiser Family Foundation study found.
- A sizable majority of people say they want to die at home, but 60 percent die in hospitals or institutions.



Planning your final days is never easy, but it's an invaluable gift to your loved ones. These discussions can be among the richest and most intimate that friends and family share. Studies show that when there is a meaningful conversation about end-of-life choices, survivors report feeling guilt and less depression and having an easier process of grieving.

And thinking through these issues before a medical crisis – at the kitchen table rather than in the intensive care unit – will help you and your loved ones make decisions based on what you value most, without the influence of stress and fear.

Here's a plan for getting started, to give family caregivers a jumping-off point for this all-important talk to help them keep it going over time.

Get Ready

It's fine to spend time thinking about the conversation before you dive in. As you prepare, ask yourself these questions:

1. What do I need to think about or do before I feel ready to have the conversation?
2. What particular concerns do I want to be sure to bring up? (Examples might be getting finances in order, or

making sure a particular family member is taken care of.)

Consider having a practice conversation with a trusted friend or writing a letter to a loved one (or even to yourself). And remember that the conversation might reveal disagreements. That's OK. You'll want to discuss those issues now, not during a medical crisis.

Get Set

Finish this sentence, or ask your aging loved one to do it:

“What matters to me at the end of life is....”

Sharing a “what matters to me” statement with your family can help them communicate to your doctors what abilities are most important to you and what treatments are, and aren't, worth pursuing. It can also give your loved ones reassurance that they're following your wishes.

Go!

Once you feel ready to share your end-of-life wishes, or to solicit them from a loved one, think about the basics: who, what, where, and when.

Who should be part of the discussion?

The list could include not just particular family members but also friends, doctors, caregivers, members of the clergy and others.

When would be a good time to talk? Do you want to broach the subject at a family gathering – around the holidays, for example?

Where would you feel comfortable talking? Around the kitchen table? At a favorite restaurant or park? Choose a setting you think will be conducive to an intimate, open conversation.

What do you want to be sure to say? List the three most important things you want family, friends or doctors to know about your end-of-life wishes and incorporate them into the discussion.

Keep in mind that you don't have to steer the conversation – just let it happen. You don't have to cover everyone and everything right off the bat. Be patient and give others time to think about what's being said.

Remember that nothing is set in stone. You and your loved ones can revisit issues as circumstances change. If there are disagreements, try not to judge: A “good death” means different things to different people.

Keep going

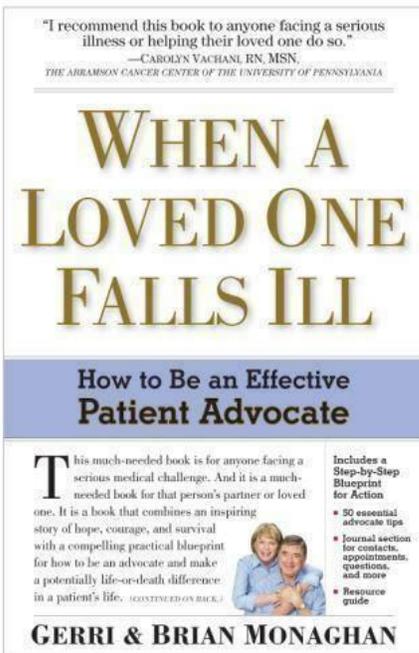
Congratulations! You've broken the barrier. This initial conversation will hopefully be the first of many. Think about how it went, and how you'd like future talks to go.

Another important follow-up to the conversation is putting what you talked about in writing, in legal documents that will ensure those wishes are respected when the time comes.

Create a power of attorney for health care in which you can appoint an agent (commonly called a health care proxy) to make medical decisions for you, based on your expressed wishes, if you can no longer speak for yourself.

Create an advance directive that lays out your wishes regarding end-of-life medical care, including what kinds of treatment you do or don't want.

Full Article: [How to Start Talking About End-of-Life Care \(aarp.org\)](https://www.aarp.org/health/advance-care/advance-care-directive)

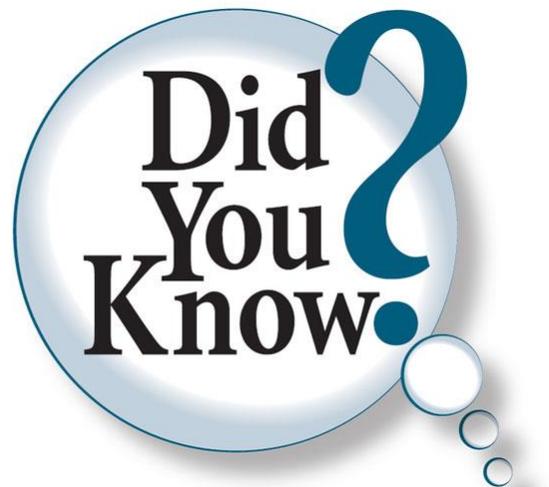


The book of the month is a much-needed book for anyone facing a serious medical challenge. And it is a much-needed book for that person's partner or loved one. It is a book that combines an inspiring story of hope, courage, and survival with a compelling practical blueprint for how to be an advocate and make a potentially life-or-death difference in a loved one's life.

Authors - Gerri & Brian Monaghan

Medicare Part B will complete a home safety assessment. The home safety assessment or evaluation must be ordered by the beneficiaries' primary care physician. The home health care agency will bill Medicare, then your Part B benefits will pay for the assessment.

The assessor will observe and discuss with you the following issues as they are relevant. Five categories to assess during a home safety assessment are fire response, exit procedures, smoke detectors, fire extinguisher, causes of fires and fire prevention.



Upcoming Events

FAMILY CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUP

The Caregiver Support Group is a monthly group that offers a safe place to discuss the stresses, challenges, and rewards of providing care for an aging loved one. The meetings will be held virtually for the foreseeable future from noon to 1 p.m.

May's session will be held on Thursday, May 13, 2021 from noon to 1 p.m. Please RSVP (stacey.l.bonner@vanderbilt.edu) for Zoom details by Wednesday, May 12.



LUNCHTIME SESSION

The Lunchtime Session is a monthly educational session to receive valuable information while providing care to your loved one.

This month, Dr. Jennifer Kim and Dr. Kanah Lewallen with Vanderbilt University School of Nursing will present the fourth session for family caregivers of individuals with dementia/Alzheimer's.

They will discuss working with the healthcare team and navigating the future. This session will include communicating with your healthcare team, advanced care planning, and palliative and hospice care.

May's lunchtime session will be held on Wednesday, May 19, 2021 from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. Please RSVP (stacey.l.bonner@vanderbilt.edu) for Zoom details by Tuesday, May 18 or select the May's zoom link on the attached flyer.



“You are a treasure, a modern-day angel, a warrior when times are tough, a soothing balm when there is pain, a shining light when there is darkness.”

-A FIT Caregiver