

## Elder Care: When is it Time to Intervene?

By Kate McCarthy, Director of Operations at HomeAid Health Care

After the holiday madness settles and winter sets in, families often notice that their elderly loved ones have care issues that need to be addressed. Suggesting the need for extra help coming into the home or introducing the idea of moving into an assisted living situation is a difficult and sensitive subject to raise. Many elderly refuse to face that their health-related challenges or limitations due to aging are serious enough to warrant action. Fear of treading on their loved one's privacy and independence often limits families from broaching the subject and taking an active role.

So how do you know if it is the right time to take action? There are several areas that family members need to look at when determining if it is the right time to intervene in their elderly loved one's lives.

- Medical Issues – Often a diagnosis of a disease, illness or injury affects the quality of daily life and requires active intervention.
- Medication Issues - Difficulties in managing medication dosage and frequency, or confusion in changes in prescriptions can result in pills that are not taken and pose a risk that needs to be addressed.
- Behavior Issues – Changes in behavior such as excessive anxiety, irritability, or social withdrawal or depression can be the signal that there are underlying cognitive issues, such as Alzheimer's or Dementia, that should be checked.
- Nutritional Issues – Lack of healthy, nutritional food in the house, lack of balanced meals, inability to manage grocery shopping, or clean out spoiled food from the fridge all point to the need for help.
- Mobility Issues – Unexplained dents and scratches on the car can indicate changes in reflexes, vision, and ability to respond to unexpected situations and can be signals that continuing driving poses a great risk.
- Hygiene Issues – Noticeable body odors, lack of basic hygienic tasks and grooming, and inability to choose clothing all are common signs that help is necessary.
- Housekeeping Issues – Daily living tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and laundry plus managing the household finances becomes difficult at some point for the aging. When these tasks are continuously left undone it is a clear indication that intervention is necessary.
- Safety Issues – Forgetfulness about keeping house locked and secure, carelessness with lit cigarettes and gas stoves, and lack of safety features in bathroom can all lead to accidents and are issues that require active family intervention.

When first raising the subject of getting additional help in the home or the need to move to an assisted living facility, it is important to include your loved one in the conversation. Involving them in the discussion can alleviate some of their anxiety about making life changes and make choosing a solution less stressful for all involved. Remember the goal is to find a solution that provides the amount of care your loved one needs, while maintaining as much independence as possible. It takes time and energy to shift through all the options available. That is why it is a good idea to research all the elder care solutions ahead of time. Then when it is time to intervene, you and your loved one can make a smooth transition.

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*Helping Hands at Home*

Kate McCarthy is Director of Operations for HomeAid Health Care which provides non-medical home services for the elderly who wish to remain safe and independent at home. HomeAid is a sister company to Prairie Home Assisted Living which has served the physical, spiritual, mental and health needs of their residents since 1999. Together the two companies provide comprehensive care that meets the needs of the elderly in the Fox Valley.