

# Caregiver's HOME COMPANION

Volume 6 Issue 6 | February 2008

www.caregivershome.com

H E L P I N G   T H O S E   W H O   H E L P   O T H E R S

## Sometimes a Referee Can Help Coping with a Difficult Parent

By Paula McCarron

**W**hen it comes to caring for an aging parent, most family caregivers have a story or two to tell about Mom's reluctance to accept help in her home, Dad's refusal to move into an assisted living facility, or something similar. But while it's perfectly normal to expect some degree of resistance or anger from an aging parent facing a life-altering circumstance, there are some whose everyday dealings with a caring adult child can make caregiving a grueling, almost crippling experience.

While they're simplistically referred to as "difficult parents," these seniors make persistent unreasonable demands, are openly hostile and hyper-critical, and attempt to control through intimidation, manipulation, threats, tears or even bribes. Ironically, this exasperating behavior is often directed toward the very person the aging parent relies upon most—the adult child who willingly steps into the role of their caregiver.

"In situations like these, the frustra-



tions will come out. And those frustrations lead to a treadmill effect. Everyone is making noise and going nowhere," says Marion Somers, a Brooklyn-based elder-care expert known professionally as "Doctor Marion."

So, if this sounds like your parental caregiving relationship, how do you get off the treadmill and begin having positive communication and a healthy relationship with your unruly and unappreciative parent?

### First Steps

First, it's important to assess the situation. If your relationship with your parent has always been a web of tension, anger, and negativity, then it's likely that the situation is not going to change. But if this challenging behavior has occurred only recently, as in the last months or recent years, underlying health reasons could have triggered the changes in your parent's behavior.

Certain health conditions such as stroke, heart disease, diabetes, Parkinson's disease, and dementia are often accompanied by

depression. Medications used to treat high blood pressure, arthritis, pain, heart disease, and other ailments can also lead to depression. Given the degree of loss experienced by aging individuals, it's not uncommon for depression to take its toll on a person's ability to cope with life stresses. Depression may present itself in a variety of ways, including social isolation, tearfulness, lack of self care, or projection of anger onto others.

For all of these reasons, it's important to start with a good medical evalua- ►

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

**3** **When Dressing Becomes a Chore**  
Solutions for Keeping Loved Ones Independent

**4** **Caregiving Gadgets and Gizmos**  
New Ways to Keep Mind Fresh, Blood Pressure Low

**6** **Exercise and the Elderly**  
Why You and Mom Should Work Out Together

**8** **A Caregiver's Spring Cleaning Checklist**  
5 Tips Heading Into Spring

**Subscriptions**

Print: \$29.95 per year (U.S.)  
Online: \$19.95 per year (U.S.)

**Call toll-free to subscribe:  
1-877-259-1977**

Editor and Publisher  
**Chris Pederson**

Marketing Director  
**Shelly Harvey**

Strategic Business Development  
Director  
**Karen B. Knowles**

Custom Publishing & Operations  
Director  
**Robert G. Whitton**

Art Director  
**Laura D. Campbell**

Webmaster  
**NOW Interactive Solutions**  
webmaster@caregivershome.com

**Mail**  
Caregiver's Home Companion  
P.O. Box 693  
Southport, CT 06890-0693

**Phones**  
Subscriptions & Customer Service:  
(877) 259-1977  
Advertising & Sales: (203) 254-3538

Administration & Editorial:  
(203) 254-3538

Custom Publishing: (203) 438-0810

**e-mail Inquiries:**  
editor@caregivershome.com

©Copyright 2008  
Pederson Publishing, Inc.  
All rights reserved.

Caregiver's Home Companion  
is published monthly by:  
**Pederson Publishing, Inc.**  
P.O. Box 693,  
Southport, CT 06890-0693

Visit us at [www.caregivershome.com](http://www.caregivershome.com)

Caregiver's Home Companion is produced by caregivers and professional healthcare workers. While this publication is not intended as a substitute for professionally administered medical advice, the practical suggestions, advice and tips made in this newsletter have been tested or reviewed by an individual or organization involved in caring for elderly other loved ones. Caregiver's Home Companion also strives to obtain the input of educators and researchers in all branches of medical and scientific research. We welcome your comments and suggestions at [editor@caregivershome.com](mailto:editor@caregivershome.com).

## Coping with a Difficult Parent

*Continued from page 1*

tion by a geriatric specialist, if the parent borders on being out of control. Behavioral issues often accompany both dementia and the diagnosis of depression, so a screening for both conditions should be part of the assessment.

### Listen and Learn

Next, adult children need to have a "third ear" and an open mind to listen and understand the views of their aging parent. Somers says that adult children too often attempt to "fix problems" for their parents. "Adult children come in with their ideas of what is best," notes Somers, "and what this says to the aging parent is 'I've got to get you off of my to-do list. You are my problem and I have the solution'."

She adds: "No matter how much you want to help your parent, you don't want to ruin a relationship, and you don't want to make a difficult or strained relationship worse. Speak as one adult to another. Studies show that only 7% of our communication is understood through our words; the rest comes from our body language, tone, volume, and facial expressions so how we communicate with our aging parents is most important."

Somers feels that an adult child feeling pinned down by an uncooperative parent must look beyond their own feelings to the cause, in order to diffuse the situation. "Adult children need to take the time to explore the feelings of their parents, discuss options, address the fear of the unknown, and negotiate for best solutions. There is no quick fix in this whole thing," says Somers.

### Professionals May Help

An aging parent may be so entrenched or angry that it might help to seek counsel from a variety of sources. For example, a trusted physician, pastor or rabbi may be helpful. Other helpful allies include geriatric care managers (GCM) or elder mediators. GCMs tend to focus on finding available resources or sources of assistance, while elder mediators serve as neutral parties to help families reach consensus on decisions. And while a GCM may be able to conduct some degree of mediation, the mediator's expertise is in helping families resolve conflicts by finding acceptable solutions.

"Unlike counseling, mediation's purpose is not to address family dynamics or to heal or change the family system. Sometimes a side benefit of mediation is that family members improve their relationships and heal some wounds, but that is not the purpose of mediation," says Dana Curtis, a California elder mediator.

## DEALING WITH A CROTCHEY PARENT

Sometimes dealing with an abusive or controlling parent can leave you feeling like there's no way out, but these guideposts will help you find your way to resolution:

1. Participate in support groups locally or online.
2. Use workplace programs and benefits such as employee assistance programs or family leave benefits. Ask for flex time.
3. Hire a geriatric care manager to serve as an advisor and ally.
4. Tap into the wealth of information on the internet and in bookstores.
5. Be pro-active in seeking help before a crisis.
6. Seek compromise rather than control.
7. Don't make promises you may not be able to keep.

### Tips for Reaching Solution

Curtis offers these tips in finding mutually acceptable solutions between crotchety aging parents and their caregiving adult children:

1. Create the opportunity for all interested family members, as well as the aging parent, if possible, to come to understand one another's perspective on the situation. Spend whatever time is necessary to give everyone a chance to listen and understand each other's views.
2. Focus on the needs of the various parties, rather than their wants. Needs can be met in a number of ways, sometimes very creatively. "Wants" generally have only one way of being satisfied.
3. Get help from a mediator before you start, if your family has a history of difficulty in communicating and making decisions.

When hiring an elder mediator, be sure to ask about their level of training and experience. Mediators often will provide for a no-cost initial assessment of 45 minutes to an hour to explain their services and identify what they may be able to offer to your specific situation. Mediators may be found by referrals from geriatric care managers, elder law attorneys, or local senior centers.

### There Are Boundaries

Still, no matter how much you may want to help an aging parent, your parent is an adult with the right to make their own decisions. As Somers says, "Every competent adult has a right to make decisions on their own behalf. The adult child may feel a social or moral obligation to

*continues on page 5*

# When Dressing Becomes a Chore

## Solutions for Keeping Loved Ones Independent

By Melissa A. Goodwin

---

“You know you’re getting old when you stoop to tie your shoelaces and wonder what else you could do while you’re down there.” —George Burns

---

**W**hen you got dressed this morning, you probably didn’t think much about all the little movements involved that require dexterity, flexibility and a bit of strength. You most likely didn’t give it a second thought when you pulled your shirt over your head, zipped a zipper, fastened buttons or pulled on your socks and shoes. But for millions of our elderly, those simple acts can be painful, frustrating and nearly impossible because of physical limitations resulting from frailty, illness or disability.

The number of Americans affected by the basic daily challenge of getting dressed is staggering: More than 40 million have arthritis, which limits their range of movement and can make even the simplest movements excruciatingly painful. As many as 700,000 suffer a stroke each year, often leaving limbs immobile and inflexible. Hundreds of thousands more of us must deal with physical constraints resulting from diseases such as Parkinson’s, Huntington’s, multiple sclerosis and cancer.

Now, just imagine if all these people could no longer live independently simply because they could no longer tie their shoes or button their shirt.

And this is just the elderly themselves; what about their caregivers, who are likewise impacted by the limitations



of their loved ones to keeping up with the basics needed to function independently?

### Common Problems

One fact is very clear—the most common problems that elderly people have with dressing are actions requiring dexterity, such as manipulating fasteners like buttons, hooks and eyes, and zippers. What’s more, movements that require strength or the flexibility to raise and lower the arms may be extremely painful. Because of this, pulling clothing on and off over the head or bending over to reach socks and shoes can become exercises in agony and frustration. People who have had strokes may be unable to raise their arms and maneuver them into sleeves, and caregivers will find it awkward and exhausting trying to help them wrangle into and out of clothing.

Fortunately, demand for solutions for the growing population of elderly with special needs as well as their caregivers has led to innovation in adaptive clothing and tools that take the frustration out of getting dressed. You can now purchase attractive clothing modified in ways that make it easy to put on and take off. Or, you can make simple alterations to your loved one’s clothes that will accomplish the same purpose.

Additionally, some nifty tools have been created to assist with the overall process of getting dressed, and you can help your loved one stay safe while dressing by making a few simple changes to the way they go about it.

### Altering Existing Clothing

If you are handy with a sewing machine and needle and thread, you can make simple alterations to existing clothing to make it easier to manage. The nice thing about making alterations is that it allows your loved ones to continue wearing their favorite pieces, such as holiday dresses or a favorite shirt or blouse. Here are some ideas for simple changes that will help:

- Replace factory buttons with bigger buttons and buttonholes or large snaps
- Sew Velcro closures into the facing of shirts and blouses so it isn’t necessary to fasten buttons. Then re-sew the but-

*continues on page 7*

## Caregiving Gadgets and Gizmos

# New Ways to Keep Mind Fresh, Blood Pressure Low

By Kelly D. Morris

**O**ur ongoing examination of products for seniors and their caregivers continues to turn up creative items that address our loved ones' special needs as well as those of us who care for them.

This time we've looked at dozens of new products with a special eye to highlighting things that will benefit your loved one's health, improve their independence, and make life easier for you both. We've also kept an eye out for new products that will bring you closer together. Here are some of our most recent favorite finds.

### Control Blood Pressure Melodically

RESPeRATE is an electronic device intended to help lower blood pressure naturally by pacing your breathing. It works by analyzing individual breathing patterns and creating customized melodies of two distinct inhale and exhale tones for a user. Its manufacturer, InterCure, Inc., of Fort Lee, New Jersey, says that just listening to the melody through headphones will help naturally pace breathing.

By gradually prolonging the exhalation



tone, RESPeRATE helps slow your breathing, which relaxes the muscles that surround your blood vessels, thereby reducing blood pressure levels. While breathing returns to normal after each RESPeRATE session, the beneficial effect on your blood pressure lasts, according to InterCure.

The company also says that clinical studies have shown that after three to four weeks of use, RESPeRATE reduces blood pressure an average of 14 points systolic (the top number) and 8 points diastolic (the bottom number).

RESPeRATE retails for \$299. For more information or to order, visit [www.resperate.com](http://www.resperate.com) or call 877-988-9388.

### 'Talking' Monitor for Checking Blood Pressure

The LifeSource Talking Auto-Inflation Blood Pressure Monitor is simple to use and may be a good option for the aging eye. It sports a blood pressure cuff that automatically inflates at the touch of a button. It also has a large digital display to show both your blood pressure and pulse, and it will also announce results audibly.

The LifeSource monitor comes with a large-print instruction manual, and an audio manual is also available from LifeSource upon request.

This monitor retails for about \$119. Look for LifeSource blood pressure monitors at your local pharmacy or visit [www.andmedical.com](http://www.andmedical.com) or call 888-726-9966 to find a nearby retailer.



### HandiRecords Keep Medical Records... Handy

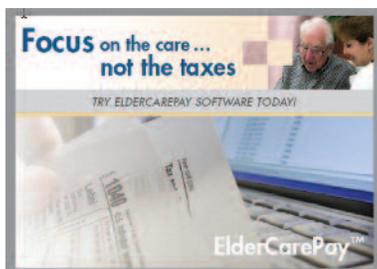
Whenever you take your loved one to the doctor or emergency room, you need to know what medications they use, what other doctors they're seeing, what conditions they've been diagnosed with, and all sorts of other medical information. It can be difficult to remember at the best of times, but particularly hard in an emergency situation.

HandiRecords is a checkbook-sized organizer with 24 pages to record doctors' contact information, medications, allergies, hospitalizations, medical tests, doctors' appointments, and other medical information. It's easy to carry in a purse or pocket where all that information can be at your fingertips.

HandiRecords comes in two styles, Classic and Tri-fold, and costs \$5.99 and \$9.99, respectively. You can also purchase a plastic card holder that fits inside HandiRecords to hold insurance cards, appointment cards, and so on for \$2.99 more. You can order online at [www.handirecords.com](http://www.handirecords.com) or by calling 866-349-8653.

### Legal Tracking of Elder Care Payments

ElderCarePay is a software package that helps you manage the task of paying for in-home elder care. If you hire someone to come in and care for mom or dad, you're responsible for reporting that person's income to the IRS. You're responsible ▶



for withholding federal, state, and local taxes, as well as Social Security and Medicare—that’s the law. ElderCarePay helps you do all that on your computer.

ElderCarePay calculates taxes for you and prints W-2 forms (those tax forms sent to employees at the end of the year). It also prints paychecks (you’ll have to purchase blank checks for this purpose). Its maker, Essentia Software, describes it as easy to set up and use.

If you want to pay extra, Essentia will set it up and enter all of your information for you. This set-up service may come in handy because it includes preparing all the paperwork to request your state and federal employee identification numbers. If you don’t know how to do these things, the company will do it for you.

The software costs \$147.95 per year. To have ElderCarePay set your account up for you, it costs \$99.97 for one caregiving employee and \$49.97 for each additional employee. To purchase, visit [www.eldercarepay.com](http://www.eldercarepay.com). You can also phone 888-999-1722 for more information.

### Mind Exercises with Online Games

Happy Neuron games have been specifically designed by a cognitive psychologist to target the five major areas of cognitive functioning—memory, attention, language, executive function (that means logic, reasoning, and problem solving),



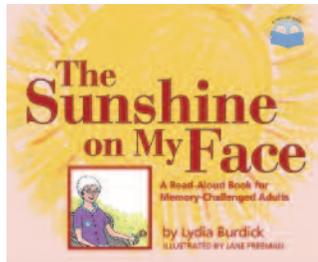
and visual/spatial function (that means operating in a 3-dimensional world and interpreting visual information). Research shows that actively participating in brain fitness workouts like these can help defer the onset of diseases like Alzheimer’s.

Happy Neuron offers more than 25 different online games. Players can log on from any computer that has internet access. The games are easy to learn and do not require a great deal of computer know-how to play. There is plenty of variety to keep things interesting, and the games should challenge players of all skill levels.

There is a “Virtual Coach” to track a player’s progress and compare results to other players of similar gender, age, and education levels. Games are then recommended to improve an individual’s areas of weakness.

The Happy Neuron games are available online for a monthly fee of \$9.95 or for an annual fee of \$99.95. You can try them free for seven days by signing up at [www.happy-neuron.com](http://www.happy-neuron.com). You can also call 800-560-0966 for more information.

### Book Helps Jog Fading Memories



*The Sunshine on My Face: A Read-Aloud Book for Memory-Challenged Adults* by Lydia Burdock is a 34-page hardcover picture book written

for adults with Alzheimer’s or other memory disorders. The book is designed to stimulate conversation and reminiscence and to promote physical closeness and interaction, all important things for adults dealing with dementia.

The pictures are bright and bold, and the print is large enough to be easily read. Described as a “two-lap book,” it’s a wonderful book to share with your loved one.

*The Sunshine on My Face* is available through most bookstores and generally retails for \$17.95, but you can find it cheaper at online booksellers. ■

*Kelly Morris is a former social worker and home health and hospice worker whose writing has appeared in a number of health-related journals. She lives in Mansfield, Ohio, and can be reached at [multihearts@hotmail.com](mailto:multihearts@hotmail.com).*

### Coping with a Difficult Parent

*Continued from page 2*

help, but the parent makes the choices as long as he or she is legally competent.”

If an aging parent is truly not competent or is in a state of self-neglect, it may be possible to receive help from the local Area on Aging, or in more extreme circumstances a call may be made to the state office of Adult Protective Services. To locate these services in your area, phone Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 or visit their website at [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov). In some situations, an incompetent parent may be placed under guardianship or conservatorship if there has been no prior arrangement made to appoint a decision-maker.

Somers says, “Most caregivers are doing the very best they can with the resources they have—time, money, knowledge. What they may need to do is accept the fact they will also need to find and accept help in caring for their parents and to preserve their relationships.” ■

*Paula S. McCarron has more than 20 years of experience in health care, including nursing homes and hospice. She lives in Chelmsford, Massachusetts, and can be reached at [paulamccarron@gmail.com](mailto:paulamccarron@gmail.com).*

## COMING UP IN MARCH

- Think your hands are full caring for one aging family member? Try caring for two—or more—at the same time for a most monumental challenge. Tips on how to prepare for and handle an increasingly common circumstance.
- Self-medicating by our elderly—we’ll tell you about the dangers, what to look for, and how to deal with this frequent problem.
- Seniors are at increased risk of cavities and gum disease from a condition known as Xerostomia, or dry mouth. A caregiving primer on a syndrome that can be triggered by a loved one’s meds or stress.
- With all the recent emphasis on staying physically fit at any age, we turn the spotlight on brain fitness and how to stay mentally fit—without breaking a sweat.

## Exercise and the Elderly

# Why You and Mom Should Work Out Together

By Kelly Morris

**W**hat if your mom was your workout buddy? Can you picture that? Mom and daughter supporting and encouraging each other into good health, physically and mentally? It's an inspiring—and productive—picture that's catching on with more and more caregivers.

With time so short, when can we exercise—no matter that we know it's the right thing to do? Well, our aging parents are no different—and often they have the same excuses as we do for not more aggressively taking steps to exercise for our health. So the buddy system might inspire us both.

The evidence of exercise's benefit is all around us. One study found that nursing home residents who took tai chi classes were less likely to suffer falls than residents who did not participate in the classes. Other studies have shown that weight-bearing exercises help prevent osteoporosis. Regular exercise helps prevent heart disease, lowers blood pressure, and lowers cholesterol. It improves circulation, which is important for folks with conditions such as diabetes. It improves joint mobility, which is particularly important for those with arthritis. And, of course, it also helps maintain a healthy body weight.

In addition to all of the physical benefits of exercise, there are psychological benefits as well. Exercise causes the release of endorphins in the brain. Endorphins are chemicals that make us feel good. Exercise relieves stress and even helps reduce depression. In fact, many counselors and psychiatrists recommend it as part of a complete treatment plan for depression and anxiety.

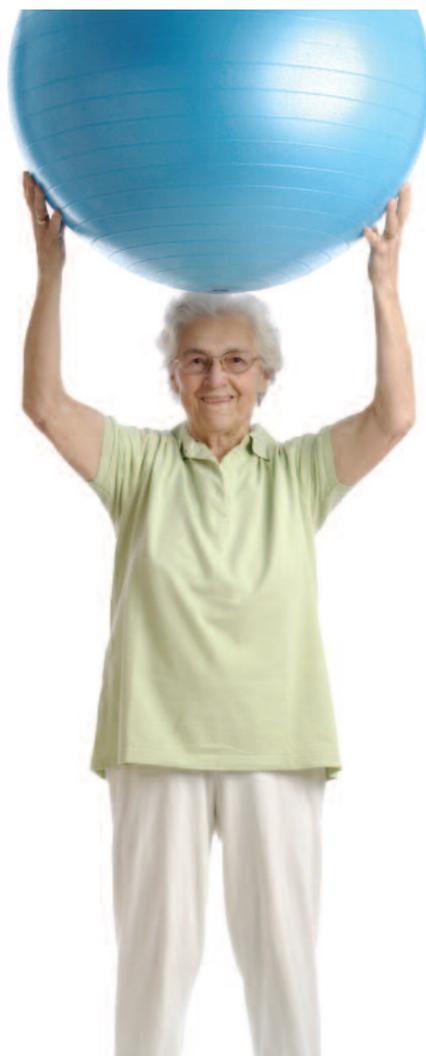
### Stimulating Older Minds and Flesh

Exercise also can provide mental stimulation and increased awareness for those with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. When Frank Eisele of Montgomery, Ohio, joined an adult day

care center that provided an exercise program, his adult children noticed that he seemed more alert at home. "He was definitely more aware of what was going on around him," says his daughter Sandra.

Exercise can improve self-esteem, help the elderly feel more confident, and also drive them to become more independent. "Exercise may well be the modality for not only adding years to life, but [it] also can add life to years," says Mary Josephine Hessert of the University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine in Biddeford, Maine.

So maybe it is important for mom to



exercise, but why should you work out with her? Well, you'll reap the same benefits. Caregiving is stressful, and you can use the relief exercise can provide. In addition, the shared activity can work wonders for your relationship with mom.

### What Kind of Workout Works?

Working out together can be more fun than working out alone. In fact, you and mom may want to consider enrolling in an exercise class together. The YMCA is a good place to look for a low-cost, quality class. If mom's going to be working out without you, or if she needs a slower-paced class, a local senior center is a good place to start. They often offer classes that include "chair exercises," exercises done while sitting down, for those unable to stand for long periods of time for whatever reason.

If you prefer to exercise in the privacy of your own home, you can purchase an exercise video or DVD. There are many to choose from, and a number of them are designed with seniors in mind. Look for gentle workouts that are easier on the body. These often involve stretching and strengthening the body rather than aerobic workouts. Pilates, tai chi, or yoga may be good choices for exercising together. (No, you don't have to be able to make yourself into a pretzel to do yoga!) You can modify the workouts to fit mom's capabilities.

You can also choose to keep it simple and go for daily walks. Walking is great exercise. It gets the circulation going, and because it is a weight-bearing exercise, it helps fight osteoporosis. If you walk outdoors, you get fresh air and sunshine. Sunlight helps fight depression, especially during winter months. When weather does not permit walking outdoors, many people walk at the local shopping mall. There's plenty of mental stimulation there to go along with exercise with your new workout buddy.

Choose from among a variety of exer- ►

cises. Try a walk one day, exercise to a video the next, attend a class the day after that, and so on. Variety will keep both you and mom interested. The exception is if mom suffers from dementia. In that case, she will probably do better with a routine that stays the same day after day.

### Exercising Safely

Before starting an exercise program, it's a good idea to talk to mom's doctor, especially if she has health problems or physical limitations. You may want to consult a physical therapist to customize a program just for her.

You've probably heard the saying "no pain, no gain." Ignore the "no gain" part and aim for no pain. If an exercise hurts, don't do it. Start slowly and build up endurance over time. Whether exercising as prescribed by a physical therapist, taught in a class, or demonstrated on a video, exercising correctly is more important than doing it quickly or doing a lot of any one routine.

To minimize the risk of falls, you and mom both should wear shoes with non-skid soles, such as sneakers, while working out. If mom has problems with balance, place a sturdy chair within easy reach so she can grab onto the back of it if she feels wobbly.

Drink plenty of water before, during, and after a workout session to prevent dehydration. Being well-hydrated will give you more energy, as well.

### OK, Now How Do I Convince Mom?

Talk to your mom about the benefits of exercise and encourage her to talk to her doctor about it. But you may have to practice what you preach. If you're not going to work out yourself, you may have some trouble getting mom moving. That's why working out together is such a good idea.

Just tell mom you want to take a tai chi class and you'd really like her to come with you. Tell her you want her to be your workout buddy. She'd probably love to spend the time with you. Or drop by and ask her to go for a walk with you. It probably won't be a hard sell. ■

---

*Kelly Morris is a former social worker and home health and hospice worker whose writing has appeared in a number of health-related journals. She lives in Mansfield, Ohio, and can be reached at [multihearts@hotmail.com](mailto:multihearts@hotmail.com)*

### When Dressing Becomes a Chore

*Continued from page 3*

- tons onto the front so that the garment maintains its original appearance
- Replace zippers with Velcro closures
  - Replace short zippers with longer ones to increase the size of the opening
  - Enlarge armhole openings so it is easier to pull clothing on and off
  - Sew loops onto the side of trousers and underwear so they can be easily pulled up
  - Get rid of all clothing that fastens in the back.

### Purchasing Adaptive Clothing

Shirley Gustin started her New Hampshire business, Adaptive Clothing, because of her many years of experience as a nurses' aide showed her the need for clothing that is both easy to negotiate and looks nice. In her clothing line, Shirley has taken great pains to maintain the dignity of seniors by using attractive fabrics, coordinating outfits, and creating designs that maximize modesty.

"Sometimes we forget that it is still important to elderly people to look nice," she says. "If you take a 90-year-old woman and put her in a pretty blouse with a skirt that matches, and someone tells her how nice she looks, believe me, it will make her day!"

So far, relatively few businesses specialize in adaptive clothing. Shirley's clothing line for men and women can be viewed at [www.adaptiveclothing.com](http://www.adaptiveclothing.com), or you can call the store at 1-800-572-2224. Buck and Buck ([www.buckandbuck.com](http://www.buckandbuck.com)) is another good source, as are Clothing Solutions ([www.clothingsolutions.com](http://www.clothingsolutions.com)) and Silvert's ([www.silverts.com](http://www.silverts.com)), among others.

When purchasing clothes for your loved one, keep these tips in mind:

- Purchase front-fastening bras
- Switch to pull-on clothing with elastic waistbands.
- Purchase comfortable walking shoes with Velcro straps
- Buy clothing in stretchy fabrics
- Purchase clothes one size larger because the openings will be bigger
- Buy tops with wide, loose sleeves
- Buy clothes in fabrics that can be washed and dried and don't require ironing
- Buy clothes that fasten in the front

Shirley mentioned that bras can present special problems. Many older women have rounded shoulders, causing them to bend forward and compress the chest area. This can result in the bra band and snap digging into the flesh. Because of this, it's often a good idea for older women to switch over to undershirts for greater comfort.

### Safety While Dressing

Even with clothing that is easier to put on, actually getting dressed can hold dangers for your loved one. Frail people shouldn't try to balance when dressing; it's much safer to have them sit or lie on the bed when pulling on pants and skirts or putting on socks and shoes. It's also a good idea to have a sturdy chair with a fairly high seat for your loved one to use when putting on shoes and socks. The chair should have arms so they can be used for stability.

Several assistive tools are also available to help with safe dressing. There's a dressing aid that holds clothes open so they are easy to slip into. You also can purchase a long-handled shoe horn that makes it unnecessary to bend over when putting on shoes. Sock helpers that allow you to pull socks up without bending over are another innovative dressing tool. Online, [www.seniorssuperstores.com](http://www.seniorssuperstores.com) is a great source for a variety of gadgets that can help.

### Other Considerations

It's actually easier to match up buttons and buttonholes when looking in a mirror, so make sure your loved one has easy access to one. This also enables them to see if they've dressed appropriately and can reassure them that they look nice. Don't underestimate the importance to your loved one of self-esteem and outlook that comes from looking good and feeling comfortable.

Making wardrobe changes and giving your loved ones some useful tools may help them look good, stay independent longer and boost their spirits and self-esteem. ■

---

*Melissa A. Goodwin is a freelance writer and photographer living in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She has years of experience working with volunteer caregiving programs that help seniors and family caregivers. She can be reached at [meesarij@msn.com](mailto:meesarij@msn.com).*

# A Caregiver's Spring Cleaning Checklist By Molly Shomer, MSSW, LMSW

Since we're barreling forward into spring, it seems like a good time to conduct a little caregiver spring cleaning for our loved ones. Here's a short list of simple things you can do to get started. Individually none will take much time—do a little now, and a little later. With this approach, you should be much more in control by the time spring officially arrives—and it will be a small matter to keep it up.

**1.** Clean out the medicine cabinet. Toss everything with an old expiration date. Don't pour medications down the toilet or the sink; this can just pollute our water supply. Pour vinegar into the bottle or vial, tape it up, wrap it up, and put it in the trash. (I know, I know ... this puts it into the landfill. At least it's sealed, and the vinegar should make it unpalatable to anyone or anything that comes across it.) If you have unexpired medications that you or your loved one aren't taking any longer, check with the doctor about whether you should keep it "just in case." If there's a chance you'll need it before it's expired, you don't want to have to buy it again.

**2.** If you haven't already, start keeping copies of all medical records. If you or your loved one has a test done (even

basic lab work) ask for a copy of the report as soon as it's available and put it in your file. If you ever see a new doctor, or someone has a question about your medical history, you won't have to waste time trying to get the information.

**3.** For the same reason, keep records about all the medications you and your loved ones are taking. Record what did—and what didn't—work, any reactions or side effects you noted, the date you discussed any concerns with the prescribing doctor, and what the doctor said.

**4.** Make sure your loved one's primary care physician and most-involved family members have a copy of your elderly's Advanced Directive. An Advanced Directive instructs what kind of care is wanted in the event of terminal illness

and someone can't speak for them self. Advanced Directives discuss care and are not simply "pull the plug" documents. They record medical wishes in black and white.

**5.** Make note of where all important documents and records are kept. If they're scattered all around, get them organized in a logical and fireproof place. If there is an emergency, you won't want to spend days or weeks locating or getting replacements for important documents and records. ■

*Molly Shomer is a family caregiving specialist and licensed geriatric care manager. She is a nationally recognized expert on eldercare issues and the author of The Insider's Guide to Assisted Living. Her website is [www.eldercareteam.com](http://www.eldercareteam.com), and she can be reached at [molly@eldercareteam.com](mailto:molly@eldercareteam.com).*

# Give the Lasting Gift of Care

how you care to those around you who can benefit from the same information, tips, advice and how-to features you receive every month in *Caregiver's Home Companion*.

Give a gift subscription to the newsletter so the help and benefit you receive can be shared by others you care about.

Give the gift of help—a gift subscription to a family member, friend or co-worker.

Or donate an anonymous gift subscription which we will use to benefit an individual in need of the knowledge and support *Caregiver's Home Companion* provides, but may not be able to afford the few extra dollars to subscribe. We will see that your gift is properly assigned to a needy caregiver.\*

We all know the importance of "care." This is your chance to share your care with a gift subscription to help others.

Call NOW toll free at (877) 259-1977, or fill out the simple gift subscription form online at <https://www.caregivershome.com/subscriptions/giftsubscriptions.cfm>.

\* Note: anonymous subscription donations may only be submitted by using our toll free phone line.

