

# Senior Sense

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## Your Relationships

### You and Your Doctors: Two-Way Communication

Madge had suffered with breathing problems and related ailments for years. She saw her family doctor regularly, but she was also being treated by specialists and respiratory therapists. She knew them so well that they were all on a first-name basis and even exchanged holiday cards. She considered them good friends as well as part of her caregiving team.

For most seniors and their caregivers, doctors and other healthcare providers are a vital part of the daily routine. Doctor appointments can take up more days on a senior's calendar than birthdays and anniversaries! In the best situations, doctors and their staff know your loved one personally and work hard to treat the "whole person" with sensitive care,

not just the complaint of the day. Likewise, seniors and their caregivers often see the healthcare team so often that they consider them as trusted friends.

Our current healthcare system does not always encourage doctors and patients to take the time and interest to get to know each other well.

Doctors must deal with many patients efficiently and they often refer seniors to nurses or other specialized medical care providers for treatment. Many seniors have a variety of ailments that require treatment from a whole array of doctors, making it difficult to get to know any one doctor very well. Doctors as well as patients bemoan this lack of personal healthcare relationship that can be an important part of effective care.

What can be done to help ensure an understanding relationship between senior

caregivers and healthcare providers? A recent survey approached that question from two perspectives: What do caregivers want their doctors to know, and what do doctors want caregivers to understand? Here are some of their tips.

### Tips for Doctors from Caregivers

- Be as up-front and clear as possible about any health conditions or diagnoses of loved ones. Most caregivers want and need to know the whole picture.
- Consider how a diagnosis and treatment plan may affect the caregiver as well as the patient.
- Allow caregivers enough time to make decisions in non-emergency situations. Don't rush them into deciding on a certain medication or treatment.
- Describe the possible side effects of any medications that you prescribe, in plain language.
- Explain the legalities and implications of any emergency actions, from resuscitation rights to sustaining life on a respirator.
- Consider the financial resources of the patient and caregiver and be aware of low-cost options and

support in the community.

- Remember to ask how the caregiver is doing, being sensitive to signs of stress and depression. Treat the caregiver as well as the primary patient.

### Tips for Caregivers from Doctors

- Before the doctor visit, get familiar with the loved one's existing medical conditions, medications, treatment plan, etc.
- Write down your questions beforehand to ensure that you remember them all during a busy visit.
- Be honest with your concerns and questions, knowing that there may not be easy answers.
- Try to keep your emotions in check and remember that the doctor is trying to help in the best ways that he or she can.
- Understand that doctors' schedules must be flexible in order to treat critically-ill patients in an emergency. You may have to wait longer than you planned to see a doctor, even with an appointment.
- Some doctors offer consultation appointments that allow time to discuss all your issues and concerns.

Trust and open communication are important to all close relationships, and they are particularly important among all members of a caregiving team. Good communication requires listening – to words as well as feelings -- as well as speaking. What can you do to better understand the needs of your healthcare team, and what could they do to better understand you?

*Adapted from Caregiver.com, 2012.*

## Your Health

### You Can Prevent Childhood Overweight and Obesity

Many of our children are overweight and obese. Yes, chubby cheeks look cute, but they may lead to serious problems like type 2 diabetes, early heart disease, high blood pressure, asthma and even problems with the hips and legs.

As a grandparent, you can have an impact on what your grandchildren consume and how active they are. Whether they just visit occasionally or live with you, what you do matters!

The American Academy of Pediatrics has developed some guidelines

about prevention and control of this problem. Here is how you can help your family to meet these guidelines:

- Only offer water and low fat or non-fat milk for them to drink. Do not offer soft drinks, sweet tea, sports drinks, fruit drinks or any other sugary drinks. Limit juice to 4 ounces or less per day.
- Encourage breakfast. Research shows that children and teens who eat breakfast are thinner. Just make sure they are not eating breakfast at home AND at school.
  - Encourage family meals eaten at home. Teach the kids to cook. So many children (and parents) never acquire this skill. Fix recipes that are higher in fiber and lower in fat.
  - Rarely eat out. Restaurant meals are usually high in fat, sugar and sodium.
  - Do not use food as a reward. Instead, encourage the child, give a sticker, read to him or her, go to a movie, go to a park, play a game or do something that has nothing to do with food.
  - Buy active gifts like balls, sports equipment, bikes, jump ropes, roller blades, skateboards, free weights or a badminton set.

- Encourage outside play. Children and teens need a total of 60 minutes of physical activity daily. Play first – homework second.
- Limit TV and other screen time to 2 hours or less per day. In fact, for children less than two, no TV should be allowed.
- Plan meals around the new MyPlate logo. That means half the plate should be filled with vegetables and fruits, and that doesn't mean French fries.
- Keep the plate and cup sizes small, too. Those big plates and cups just encourage overeating and drinking too many calories.
- If you have a new grandchild on the way, encourage the mother to breast feed. This has been shown to keep kids at their healthiest body weight.

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## Your Resources

### Spring (or Fall) Clearing: Tackling Your Hoard

Fall has arrived in Georgia. Cooler weather makes it possible to open up the windows to air things out a bit. The fresh air prompts many people to launch a fall cleaning campaign.

Whether you feel like cleaning house or not, fall is a good time to rid your home of unneeded clutter.

Everyone has at least one drawer, closet, room, attic, basement corner, or storage shed that looks like something from an episode of Hoarders. You may have several of these places piled high and deep with various and sundry items. Or perhaps the pile has been there so long you do not even see it anymore.

In your heart, you know you need to get rid of most of this clutter, but your head knows how much work going through all that stuff will be. So you do nothing. And when that space gets filled up, a new one is created to collect still more stuff. Now you worry someone with a camera crew from Hoarders is going to show up at your front door.

Some people wait until they move to deal with accumulated clutter. That may work if you move every two or three years. If not, you may be long overdue for a plan to make sure you deal with your useless clutter. If you have lived in the same place for decades, you may even need to hire reinforcements to help you.

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Whether you tackle the clutter on your own or bring in help, here are some tips to keep you from ending up on Hoarders next season.

Select the most realistic approach. Are you more likely to deal with your stuff a little bit at a time? Or is it more likely to get done with a team of friends and family members recruited for the weekend? It may be worth paying someone by the hour. Depending on your clutter, you might also agree to share in the proceeds from a yard, garage, or online sale. Most of the time, unless you are really rich and/or popular, the nature of accumulated stuff is such that you really need to do it yourself.

Break big tasks into small ones. Instead of tackling your entire house, focus on one room or one closet at a time. This kind of work has a way of expanding, so make sure to set clear goals for what you want to accomplish in the time available. If your goal is getting the bathroom closet organized, do not spend your time scrubbing the shower stall.

Sort to kill. Be brutal about it. If you have not unpacked the box the last

three times you moved, there is a good chance you really do not need whatever it contains. Your choices: toss, recycle, sell, donate, or keep. Notice there is no I-would-use-this-if-I-got-it-fixed stack, or keep-in-case-I-lose-thirty-pounds pile.

Selling used to mean having a yard or garage sale. Today you have more options. Flea markets can be an effective way to sell household items and collectibles. Second-hand and vintage stores might offer the best outlet for quality older clothing and personal items. Online options range from auction houses to collectors and everything in between. Online options are especially useful for items that may not sell well at a yard sale, like music CDs, albums and tapes, or books.

Getting on top of the clutter is one of those jobs that often seems worse than it actually is. Even if it is a lot of work, knowing you have dealt with all your stuff and now have things organized the way you want makes it well worth the effort.

**Dear Friend,**

SENIOR SENSE is a quarterly publication provided by your local county Cooperative Extension office. It is prepared by Extension Family & Consumer Sciences specialists at The University of Georgia specifically for the educational needs of older Georgians and their caregivers. Please contact your local Cooperative Extension office for more information on these and related topics.

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