



# ELDERCARE 101

BY JENNIFER SCHAEFER

**A**mericans are living longer than ever before, and a growing number of daughters and sons—many of whom are raising their own children—find themselves called upon to care for their aging parents. Whether the time is a week from now, a year from now or 10 years from now, the time will probably come when Mom and Dad need your help—both physically and emotionally.

The first step in caring for your parents is often to help them stay in their home as long as possible. According to an American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) survey, the vast majority of seniors would much rather stay in their homes than move to another city or a retirement community. The survey also found that the older we get, the longer we want to stay put.

There are a variety of resources you can call on to help your parents “age in place”—including many right here in Bellevue. Following is our guide to help you keep your aging parents safe and comfortable at home, so that their sunset years will be much more golden.

## YOUR PARENTS’ HEALTH

One of the most important factors in whether seniors can continue to live independently is their health. Researchers have found that one’s health and lifespan are determined by a complex mix of hereditary, environmental and lifestyle factors. While there is nothing you can do to change your parents’ heredity (and likewise your own), there *are* things you can do to promote a healthier lifestyle and environment.

## ENCOURAGE REGULAR EXERCISE

According to researchers at the Mayo Clinic, exercise is one of the most important things seniors can do to stay healthy as they age. The benefits of regular exercise include weight control, improved circulation of blood and oxygen, increased muscle mass, a better mood and improved balance. “Doing some sort of exercise is very important for maintaining your functionality as you get older,” says Paul Takahashi, MD, a geriatric specialist at the Mayo Clinic. “And it’s never too late to start.”

If your parents don’t currently exercise, they should visit their doctors for a checkup before they begin. Suggest that they start slowly and choose an exercise they enjoy. One option at the Club is the Senior Conditioning class, a gentle workout designed to improve flexibility and mobility for aging adults, held every Monday and Wednesday from 10 to 11 a.m. Other options include walking, water aerobics and even common household chores, such as washing the car or raking the leaves. Encourage Mom and Dad to make exercise a habit by planning a weekly walk with them, which has the added benefit of keeping you connected.

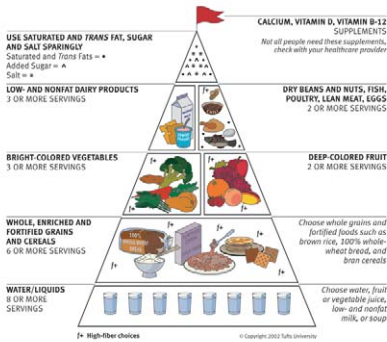
## SAFEGUARD YOUR PARENTS’ HOME

FALLS ARE A SERIOUS CONCERN FOR SENIORS AND CAN LEAD TO PERMANENT DISABILITY. THE MOST COMMON AND SERIOUS INJURY IS A BROKEN HIP. OTHER COMMON INJURIES INCLUDE A FRACTURED PELVIS, ANKLE, LEG, WRIST, FOREARM AND FOOT. HELP YOUR PARENTS PREVENT FALLS IN THEIR HOME BY FOLLOWING THESE TIPS FROM THE ALLIANCE FOR AGING RESEARCH.

- MAKE SURE THE HOME IS WELL LIT, ESPECIALLY IN HALLS AND ON STAIRWAYS.
- INSTALL HANDRAILS ALONG BOTH SIDES OF A STAIRWAY.
- MARK THE FIRST AND LAST STEPS WITH A BRIGHT, CONTRASTING TAPE.
- COVER SLIPPERY SURFACES WITH CARPETS OR RUGS THAT ARE IN GOOD SHAPE AND FIRMLY ANCHORED TO THE FLOOR; ATTACH NONSKID RUBBER BACKING TO AREA RUGS.
- USE NONSKID ADHESIVE STRIPS OR RUBBER MATS IN BATHTUBS.
- INSTALL GRAB BARS ON BATHROOM WALLS.
- ARRANGE FURNITURE SO THE PIECES DON’T CREATE OBSTACLES.

# TUFTS

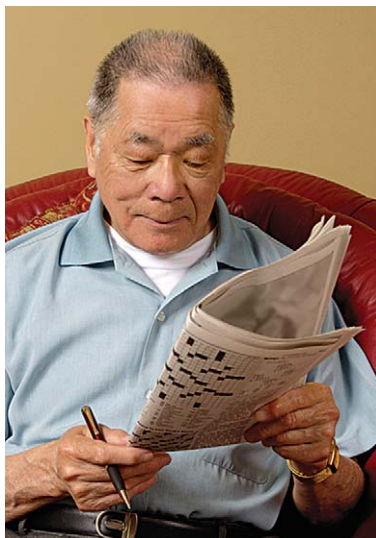
## Food Guide Pyramid for Older Adults



THE SENIOR PYRAMID HAS VISUAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WATER AND THE POSSIBLE NEED FOR SUPPLEMENTS, SUCH AS CALCIUM FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO CONSUME LESS THAN THE RECOMMENDED AMOUNT OF DAIRY PRODUCTS. THE PYRAMID IS NARROWER THAN THE TRADITIONAL PYRAMID BECAUSE OLDER INDIVIDUALS ARE LESS ACTIVE AND REQUIRE LESS FOOD TO MAINTAIN THE SAME WEIGHT.

DOWNLOAD A COPY AND LEARN MORE BY VISITING:

[HTTP://NUTRITION.TUFTS.EDU/CONSUMER/PYRAMID.HTML](http://nutrition.tufts.edu/consumer/pyramid.html)



## ENCOURAGE PROPER NUTRITION

The same rules for healthy eating—plenty of fruits and vegetables, whole grains and so on—apply as we age. The biggest difference is that aging people require fewer calories, so it is important that their food choices are nutrient-dense. A research team at the Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University has put together a modified Food Guide Pyramid for Older Adults that provides nutritional guidelines tailored to the needs of seniors (although it hasn't officially been adopted by the USDA). Just as important as giving your parents suggestions about what to eat (and preparing nutritious meals when they come to visit), is encouraging them to keep a variety of healthy foods in their kitchen. If your parents no longer drive, volunteer to take them grocery shopping at least once a week, or arrange for the grocery store to make a regular delivery.

If a parent has a medical condition that requires a special diet, such as diabetes, consider consulting a nutritionist who has experience working with older adults.

## ENCOURAGE DISEASE PREVENTION

There are certain diseases that are common among seniors, including Alzheimer's disease, osteoporosis and osteoarthritis. Although heredity plays a big role in whether one is afflicted, there are things your parents can do to stave off diseases. Mayo Clinic researchers recommend the following preventive measures.

### ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Currently, there is no way to prevent the onset of Alzheimer's disease, but several leads look hopeful. Mayo Clinic researchers say exercise, maintaining a healthy weight, controlling high blood pressure and cholesterol and eating a low-fat diet can help. The Alzheimer's Association also suggests keeping "mentally fit" by reading, writing, working crossword puzzles, attending lectures and plays, playing games, gardening and trying out memory exercises. Some doctors also believe medications and hormones can help prevent Alzheimer's; your parents can learn more from their doctors.

### OSTEOPOROSIS

The most important factor in reducing the risk of osteoporosis is getting adequate calcium and vitamin D (which helps the body absorb calcium). Most aging adults need 1,500 mg of calcium and at least 800 IU of vitamin D daily. Good sources of calcium include dairy products, greens, dried beans, tofu and calcium-fortified foods, such as orange juice. Vitamin D is made by the body when it is exposed to sunshine (20 to 30 minutes a day is sufficient). Suggest that your parents ask their doctors about their individual daily requirements and whether they need to take supplements.

### OSTEOARTHRITIS

Although most cases are not preventable, some researchers believe that osteoarthritis may develop in people who have abused their joints. If your parents have damaged or sore joints, they should be careful not to overwork them. Excess weight also increases the risk for developing osteoarthritis in the knees, and possibly in the hips and hands. Research shows that overweight middle-aged and older women who lose 11 pounds or more over 10 years can cut in half their risk for developing knee osteoarthritis.

## YOUR PARENTS' HAPPINESS

According to researchers, the happiest seniors are also the healthiest. No one can *make* anyone else happy—but naturally, you want to do everything in your power to ensure that your parents are content during their golden years. Researchers at the University of Missouri-Kansas City have found that the happiest seniors are involved in activities and with people who bring meaning and support to their lives. Encourage your parents to stay socially, mentally and emotionally engaged with the following ideas.

**CONSIDER GETTING YOUR PARENTS A PET**

A study published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* demonstrated that independently living seniors with pets tend to have better physical health and mental well-being than non-pet owners. A pet is a big commitment, however, so you shouldn't adopt one for your parents without first checking with them. If Mom and Dad are game, one local resource is the PAWS Seniors for Seniors program, which matches older adults with older dogs and cats. Senior animals are often calm, house-trained and well behaved, making them ideal companions for older adults. All adopted animals are sterilized, health-checked, vaccinated and provided with a microchip ID. For more information, call 425-787-2500, ext. 488.

**ENCOURAGE ACTIVITIES WITH OTHER SENIORS**

The Bellevue area has a lively senior community. No matter what your parents' interests are, most likely there is an activity that is perfect for them. Following are five local resources/activities.

**CITY OF BELLEVUE SENIOR SERVICES**

Bellevue's Senior Services program offers a variety of activities that support lifelong learning, independence, health and a sense of self-worth, ranging from Bingo to line-dancing lessons. Many of the activities are held at the North Bellevue Community Senior Center on 148th Ave. NE. Call 425-452-7681 for a schedule and information.

**BELLEVUE COMMUNITY COLLEGE TELOS PROGRAM FOR RETIREES**

Designed to fit the lifestyle and interests of retirees, the Telos program includes classes, such as Views of the News (current events) and Creative Writing. Call 425-564-4400 for a schedule and information.

**BELLEVUE SQUARE WALK FOR LIFE**

Seniors lace up their tennis shoes and hit the mall for exercise, conversation and window shopping every Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 8 to 9:30 a.m. Call 425-688-5800 for information.

**RETIRED SENIOR VOLUNTEER PROGRAM (RSVP) OF KING COUNTY**

Individuals aged 55 and older are invited to use their life skills to help neighbors in need. Volunteers spend from four to 40 hours a week helping provide food for the hungry, assisting law enforcement with community safety, teaching children to read or offering support to nonprofit agencies. Call 206-957-4779, ext. 116 for more information.

**OVERLAKE HOSPITAL MEDICAL CENTER'S SENIOR CARE CONNECTIONS**

This membership program, for individuals aged 55 and older who have a physician that is an active staff member at Overlake, offers a newsletter, community information, health information and educational programs. Call 425-688-5800 for information.

**INTRODUCE YOUR PARENTS TO THE INTERNET**

The Internet is a valuable tool for communication, education and entertainment. If your parents don't know how to use a computer or the Internet, there is no time like the present to teach them.

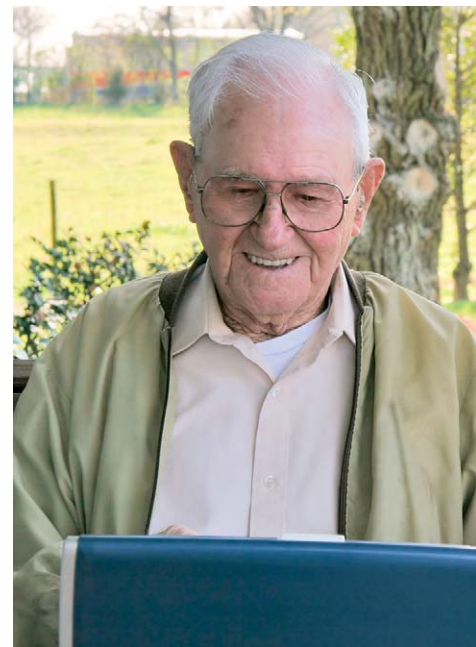
If you aren't comfortable teaching your parents about technology, two local resources can help. Bellevue Community College's Telos Program for Retirees offers an Introduction to Computers and Software course where seniors learn everything they need to know to send and check e-mail and surf the Net. For seniors willing to cross the bridge to the Westside, the city of Seattle offers a program called Seniors Training Seniors in Computer Basics. Classes are held in several Seattle locations and include Basics, Beyond Basics, Introduction to Word, Introduction to Excel and Working with Photos. If your parents are already "wired," they might consider becoming an instructor. For more information about the program, call 206-684-0639.

CATS AND DOGS PROVIDE FRIENDSHIP FOR LONELY INDIVIDUALS, OFFERING AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CARETAKING AND INTERACTION THAT AN OLDER PERSON MAY MISS IF FAMILY IS NOT NEARBY.

THE COMPANY OF A BELOVED PET HAS BEEN PROVEN TO REDUCE DEPRESSION IN THE ELDERLY, OFTEN DELAYING THE ONSET OF CONFUSION AND REDUCING THE LENGTH OF THE AVERAGE HOSPITAL STAY.



A COMPUTER MAKES A GREAT BIRTHDAY OR HOLIDAY GIFT; THE PRICE TAG FOR A BASIC SYSTEM STARTS AROUND \$1,000.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ADMINISTRATION ON AGING  
INFORMATION ON AGING FROM THE  
U.S. CENTER FOR COMMUNICATION  
AND CONSUMER SERVICES

1-800-677-1116  
WWW.AOA.GOV

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION  
OF RETIRED PERSONS

A NONPROFIT MEMBERSHIP  
ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO  
ENHANCING QUALITY OF LIFE FOR  
ALL AS WE AGE.

1-800-424-3410  
WWW.AARP.ORG

CHILDREN OF AGING PARENTS

A NONPROFIT CHARITABLE  
ORGANIZATION WHOSE MISSION IS  
TO ASSIST THE NATION'S CAREGIVERS  
WITH INFORMATION, REFERRALS  
AND SUPPORT.

1-800-227-7294  
WWW.CAPS4CAREGIVERS.ORG

CHOICE ADVISORY

A COMPLETE GUIDE TO  
RETIREMENT LIVING.

1-800-757-0921  
WWW.CHOICEADVISORY.COM

NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR  
CAREGIVING

PROVIDES SUPPORT TO FAMILY  
CAREGIVERS AND THE PROFESSION-  
ALS WHO HELP THEM.

301-718-8444  
WWW.CAREGIVING.ORG



## HELP YOUR PARENT GRIEVE

Losing your mother or father is tough—both for you and for your surviving parent. Becoming a widow or widower can cause intense grief that can last from a few months to a year or more. According to the Alliance for Aging Research, it is normal for one who has lost his or her spouse to feel despair or depression, irritability and even anger toward the person who died. Until the death is accepted, crying or talking a great deal about the lost loved one is normal. Loneliness is also common.

Following the death of a parent, make an effort to spend quality time with Mom or Dad and encourage the rest of the family to do the same. Lend an ear and a shoulder to cry on. Be open about your own feelings of loss and grief.

AARP offers several publications for bereaved adults designed to help Mom or Dad (and yourself) through the grieving process. Titles include *On Being Alone: A Guide for the Newly Widowed* and *Understanding the Grief Process*. For a complete list, visit [www.aarp.org/families/grief\\_loss/a2004-11-15-publications.html](http://www.aarp.org/families/grief_loss/a2004-11-15-publications.html).

Some parents may need special help with the social and psychological strains of being widowed. AARP has a toll-free support line staffed by trained volunteers that is for older adults and their families who have lost a loved one. The support line can be reached by calling 1-866-797-2277.

## KEEPING YOURSELF HEALTHY & HAPPY

Daughters and sons who are called on to lend support to their aging parents often forget to take care of themselves. This may not seem like a priority compared with other responsibilities in your life, but it is. You ultimately will be of little help to your parents if you neglect caring for yourself. Following are ways to keep yourself physically and emotionally fit.

- Don't forget to build a little me-time into your schedule, such as a workout, a trip to the mall or a massage.
- Set limits with Mom and Dad. Say no, but gently.
- Ask for help from family, friends and, if necessary, professionals and paid helpers. Don't try to do it all yourself.
- Realize it's not always how much time you spend with your parents, it's making sure the time you do spend is quality time.

IF YOU'RE FEELING OVERWHELMED, CONSIDER JOINING A SUPPORT GROUP. THE BELLEVUE FAMILY CAREGIVERS SUPPORT GROUP MEETS TWICE MONTHLY AT THE OVERLAKE SENIOR HEALTH CENTER. CALL 425-688-5807 FOR INFORMATION.

