

Caregiver News



Talking Points

The brain is Communication Central. In patients with conditions like Alzheimer's disease and dementia, the brain loses language-related abilities. Patients struggle with organizing and expressing their thoughts. They also struggle with understanding and responding to what's being said to them.

If you're providing care for someone with a memory disorder, here's how you can help improve communication:

- Get the person's attention before speaking. Make eye contact or lightly touch the person on the hand or arm. If there are distractions in the room, face the person at eye level while speaking.

- Speak slowly and clearly in a conversational tone. Keep your sentences short and your words simple. Don't talk down to the person.

- Keep the message simple. Too many questions at one time, too many choices or too many directions cause confusion and frustration.

- Phrase things in the positive: "Let's walk together" instead of "Don't walk over there."

- Ask questions that are shaped for a yes or no response. For example, ask "Do you like flowers?" instead of "What's your favorite flower?"

- Pay attention to what's communicated through facial expressions, gestures and body language.

- Be patient and respectful. Give the person time to think and respond. Don't interrupt or criticize.

To read more on this topic, view a helpful guide online at alz.org/national/documents/brochure_communication.pdf.

Back in Motion

Special exercises can help improve joint mobility.



Without exercise, the joints of the body grow stiff and inflexible. Some people can't do regular exercises because of a medical condition. For them, the answer may be range of motion (ROM) exercise (also called flexibility exercise). This type of exercise is used to improve joint movement in certain directions.

How to Get Patients Started

Any exercise program should be cleared in advance with a doctor. The patient—on his or her own or with a trained assistant—moves the joint within a range. In one exercise, for instance, the patient puts his or her arms out in front, palms facing, raises one or both arms as high as possible, then lowers them slowly. At first, the patient's arms may not reach shoulder height because of stiffness. Over time, however, the range may extend to above his or her head.

"Normal" range of motion will depend on the condition of the joint. Someone who has had surgery, a previous injury or has an inherited condition always has limited range of motion for that joint.

Patients get the most benefit if they do ROM exercises daily. They should start slowly and gradually increase the number of repetitions. Generally, a movement is repeated up to 10 times without resting. Then the set is repeated again. The complete series starts with the neck and moves through each joint down to the toes.

ROM exercises can be used with active, mobile patients or patients confined to bed or a wheelchair.

2 A Quick Guide to Proper Daily Foot Care

3 Tips for Elderly Safety In Extreme Weather

4 Exploring the Many Benefits of Art

Two Feet a Day Follow this checklist for proper foot care.

Happy feet? They're in your hands. When done right, foot care brings many benefits to the people you're caring for. By performing a few basic tasks, you can add to their comfort, health and well-being.

Use this checklist to guide you through routine foot care:

- Wash the feet every day. Use warm (not hot) water. Lather up with bath soap; then rinse well.

- Dry the feet thoroughly using a soft towel. Be sure to get between the toes.

- If toenails need basic trimming, do it after the feet have been bathed—that's when nails are softened. Use toenail clippers, and don't get too close to the skin. Cut straight across the nail. Then smooth sharp edges with a nail file.

- Apply foot lotion if the skin is dry or a light dusting of foot powder if sweat is a problem.

- Use clean, natural-fiber socks that are somewhat loose. Tight-fitting socks restrict blood flow.

- Select shoes that fit properly. They should offer ankle and arch support, and have a nonskid sole. When tying laces or fastening straps, leave enough room to easily move your finger between sock and shoe.

When you're caring for patients' feet, you might come across some problems that need attention right away. Be watchful, and take patients' complaints seriously. Alert the doctor promptly if you see any of the following signs:

- Unusual swelling, itching or discoloration.

- Discharge from blisters, cracks in the skin, or around a toenail—especially if you've already applied basic first aid (cleaned the wound, dried it, applied a mild antiseptic, and left it unwrapped).

- Deformities of the joints or nails.

- Numbness, tingling or pain—a sign of circulation problems.

Healthy, happy feet can put a spring in your step. So take good care of your own two feet, too!

FLU SHOT TIME December through March is peak flu season—when most cases of influenza occur. If you get a flu vaccination in October or November, you reduce your risk of becoming sick because you've given your body the time it takes to build immunity.

You need a flu shot every year, because flu viruses change quickly. Scientists design the vaccine to protect against whatever flu strains they think will be the biggest problem for the nation during the coming flu season.

A case of the flu can cause serious complications, particularly in people with medical problems. Vaccinations are strongly recommended for people with long-term illnesses (cancer, heart disease, diabetes, kidney disease and asthma, among others). They're also advised for people age 50 and older, people in nursing homes or long-term care facilities, women who will be pregnant during flu season and all children age six months to 18 years.

Why should you get a flu shot? As a caregiver, your health is very important to the people around you. Your flu shot reduces the risk that you'll get sick and spread the virus to others with whom you come into contact.

Contact the doctor with any questions about the flu vaccination for you or those in your care.

We're Going Green: Reducing Paper Claims

In an effort to go green, Bridgeway Health Solutions is urging its providers to submit all claims electronically, either over the Bridgeway Web portal or with EDI. In addition to environmental benefits, providers will also realize the following benefits:

- Claims paid faster and more accurately than paper claims.
- Reduced postage and paper costs.
- More efficient and productive submission process.
- Cleaner data submissions result in fewer claims denials.
- Faster acknowledgement of received claims.

There are two options for electronic submissions: EDI and the Bridgeway Web portal. Please contact your plan representative to help you determine which option is best for you.

If you are ready to get started, you will find a list of our associated EDI trading partners on our website at bridgewayhs.com or you may call 1-800-225-2573, ext. 25525, to speak with someone at our EDI Help Desk. You can also begin the Web registration process when you visit our website. Our staff can help you get set up for electronic submissions, choose a clearinghouse and answer any other questions about this process. For additional information about submitting claims via our website, please register at our website or contact your Provider Relations Representative.

Baby, It's Cold (or Hot) Outside

How to help keep elderly patients safe in extreme weather.



Rough weather is no match for an alert caregiver. If you're responsible for an older or ill person, you need to be alert to the potential hazards of extreme temperatures.

The elderly face the biggest health risks from hot and cold temperatures. Most deaths and hospitalizations that occur during heat waves and cold spells involve people over age 50. Aging changes the body's ability to regulate its internal temperature.

The Body's Thermostat

When you feel cold, your body's thermostat senses it and makes you shiver. That involuntary muscle action produces heat and prompts the heart to pump faster to raise body temperature.

When you feel hot, your internal thermostat signals the body to produce sweat. The cooling effect on the skin when sweat evaporates brings the body temperature down.

People become more sensitive to temperature as they age. For the elderly, even a rise or drop of just a few degrees can trigger a response from the body's thermostat.

If adjustments aren't made promptly—moving from the sun to the shade, for example, or adding a blanket—the patient's health could suffer.

Scientists aren't sure why, but blood pressure levels in the elderly are higher in colder weather than in warmer weather. Elderly people tend to have multiple chronic illnesses and take a large number of medications that may have an effect on body temperature and how it's regulated. Also in the elderly, the effects of being overweight or underweight on body temperature are heightened.

Cold-Weather Crisis

Hypothermia is a condition in which the body loses heat to the point that the brain is affected. Muscles won't coordinate; thinking is unclear. If not treated promptly, it can cause death. Hypothermia can occur indoors or outdoors.

Identify hypothermia by what the National Institute on Aging calls the “umbles”: If you see your patient stumble, mumble, fumble and grumble, call for immediate medical assistance.

Hot-Weather Hazard

Heat stroke is a life-threatening condition in which the body's temperature control mechanism stops working. In the absence of sweat, the body temperature rises into the danger zone. The heart is stressed, and brain damage is possible.

In the early stages of heat stroke, the victim may faint. As body temperature rises, behavior becomes more erratic, moving into delirium. The skin will feel dry. Call for help first, then try to cool the person. If the person is conscious and not vomiting, give small amounts of cool water—a half cup every 15 minutes.

Disaster Readiness Fire, flood, blizzard, earthquake, volcano—whatever the disaster, you can't predict when it will strike. But it pays to plan ahead for it, especially if you are caring for others.

Plot out in detail two plans of action: 1) for staying in place if that's the safest alternative, and 2) if you need to evacuate to an emergency shelter.

Have these items packed:

- Water and food that won't spoil (to last at least one week)
- Medicines (in airtight container)
- Cash and IDs
- Flashlight and radio (crank-ups are better than battery models); cell phone charger (battery-operated)
- Change of clothing, extra shoes, jacket, blanket for each person
- First aid kit
- Tool kit
- General supplies (cooking utensils, matches, toilet paper, soap, toothpaste, etc.)

The Reach of Art

Say the word “art,” and what comes to mind? If you said drawing, sculpture, photography, music, dance, poetry, drama, all of the above and more—you’re right!

Taking part in the arts adds rich layers to one’s life. You can be the artist who creates or the observer who experiences the creative product. The gift of art is that it transforms everyone involved, no matter who or where they are.

Wherever people are, creativity can thrive. In nursing homes, assisted care facilities, hospitals and senior centers, arts programs are enhancing the quality of participants’ lives. For one thing, being active in the arts exercises the brain and the body. It makes people feel more productive. To share in the experience of art is to connect with a larger world.

Here are some ideas on how to use art to help individuals or groups of people connect with their creative side and expand their horizons:



- **Music.** Play a wide range of music (show tunes, symphonies, jazz, marches, gospel, rock ’n’ roll). Encourage clapping or swaying to the beat. Do sing-alongs. Form a choral group. Keyboard or piano handy? Ask pianists to perform favorites. Encourage dancers to create or perform a routine.

- **Words.** Read aloud. Recite poetry. Show a picture and have people write about it; then share what they’ve written. Play an audio book; then talk about it. Write a one-act play about an event from childhood, and perform it or do a reading.

- **Fashion and fabrics.** Design and sew a quilt or tapestry. Create hats using netting, cloth flowers, beads, etc. Knit or crochet items for charity. Invite youngsters in for lessons from the experts.

- **Drawing or painting.** Draw self-portraits. Play music and tell people to paint what they hear. Create a mural.

- **Sculpture.** Build or create with clay, cardboard, wood, papier-mâché or a combination.

Don’t forget: Thinking of artful activities gives you a chance to exercise your own creativity. Use your imagination, and go for a masterpiece!

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