

Caring is Sharing

Chances are, you are familiar with the phrase “It’s better to give than to receive.” Based on this idea that it is “better” or “easier” to give than to receive, it should be no surprise that people often find it difficult to be on the receiving side of the care process. One of the common, yet inaccurate, beliefs about the care process is that people either give or receive. Notice how the words give and receive make the care process seem lopsided and may even suggest there is no benefit to the caregiver.

According to Mary Doepke, RN, owner of Home Helpers, “We believe the term *care sharing* better represents the care experience than *caregiving* because it more accurately reflects a mutual benefit.” As people face functional challenges due to age-related health problems, a chronic disease or an injury, it is quite common to hear them say they don’t want to be a burden to their family. Doepke said, “This type of comment is indicative of the perceived imbalance and lack of benefit to the caregivers.” The term caregiving often conjures up thoughts of people scurrying around completing a series of tasks. While there are many tactical activities associated with caregiving, such as providing help with daily living activities including meals, medications, chores and errands, one aspect of the care process that many of our clients tell us they value most is companionship.

It is probably no surprise that many people living by themselves get lonely. And, for those people who live with someone else, there is comfort in knowing a caregiver is there to provide assistance and help make life easier. Companionship is the area where the mutual benefit tends to be most apparent. “We wholeheartedly believe that everyone matters. Our clients have fascinating life experiences and wisdom to share. Whether telling a favorite story or engaging in a favorite hobby or pastime, our clients appear to thrive when reminiscing, doing things they enjoy, and making the most of each day,” said Doepke.

Asking questions can be a great way to get to know people. The following are a few questions that often lead to fascinating conversations and help people connect with one another:

- What are some of your family’s holiday traditions, and which are your personal favorites?
- What have been some of your favorite pastimes or hobbies?
- Who is the most famous person you have ever met, and how did you meet him/her?
- What’s one of your favorite stories or memories?
- What’s your favorite type of music, favorite song, favorite television show, etc.?

Holiday Gift Idea. A wonderful book about connecting, celebrating life and sharing with one another is *Tuesdays with Morrie* written by Mitch Albom.

“At Home Helpers, we believe that caregiving should be fulfilling and rewarding for both the caregivers and the care receivers. That is why we prefer the term *care sharing*,” said Doepke. The word sharing also suggests that when families are unable to provide the care loved ones need, it is okay to share the responsibility with organizations like Home Helpers. Our professional caregivers provide non-medical care services similar to what is often provided by family members and that help people maintain their independence, avoid isolation and maximize their quality of life.

Winter Safety Tips for Seniors

While inclement weather poses safety risks to people of all ages, the following safety tips are especially important for older adults. Keep these in mind this winter and share them with family and friends.

Keeping Safe Inside Your Home

- Make sure you have smoke and carbon monoxide detectors installed and working properly. Whether burning candles, using miniature lights on holiday décor, or heating your home, should there be an unexpected problem, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors can save lives. You might also keep a fire extinguisher handy and be familiar with how to operate it, just in case.
- Use extension cords per the instructions. Whether plugging in holiday décor or using a portable room heater, make sure to use the proper gauge extension cord. Also, be careful not to overload extension cords or use extensions cords that are broken or frayed. When used improperly, extension cords can overheat and become a safety hazard.
- Have the chimney inspected/cleaned before using your fireplace. It is important to use protective barriers (e.g., screen) and to ensure the proper ventilation when enjoying your fireplace. For information and safety tips, visit the Chimney Safety Institute of America at www.csia.org.
- Make sure lighting is sufficient and accessible. With shorter daylight hours, proper lighting throughout your home is especially important in the winter. Using timers and being able to control lights by a flip of a light switch are easy ways to help ensure your safety. Improper lighting is reported to be a significant factor associated with fires.
- Use walk-off mats by your doors. To help prevent slipping and falling, use walk-off mats inside your entryway and other doors to capture snow and moisture from your shoes and clothing and help keep floors dry.
- Enjoy a hot beverage. To help keep your body warm you might enjoy a cup of coffee, hot tea, hot chocolate or some warm soup.
- Stock-up on emergency supplies and have a back-up plan. Should the power go out, it is important to have a battery-operated radio, a flashlight and extra batteries, a non-electric can opener, first-aid kit, and a supply of bottled water, canned food, snack foods and pet food (as appropriate). As a precautionary measure you might also turn your water faucets so they drip and open cabinet doors under the kitchen sink to help prevent pipes from freezing.

Keep Safe When Venturing Outside

- Dress properly. Two major safety risks, hypothermia (a drop in body temperature), and frostbite (when skin tissue freezes) can often be prevented. Bundle up and wear multiple layers, put on a hat to cover your head and ears, and use mittens or gloves and a scarf to help keep warm. Go indoors if you feel cold, become confused or exhausted, etc.
- Wear proper shoes. Wear shoes with rugged or non-slip soles to help prevent slips and falls. If a surface appears shiny or wet, use extra caution as it could be icy or otherwise dangerous.
- Be careful not to overdo it. Strenuous activity such as shoveling a driveway or sidewalk, or carrying heavy firewood can lead to serious injury or even death. If you become short of breath, dizzy or start sweating profusely stop immediately and rest. Call 911 for help as appropriate.
- Keep a safety kit in the car. In case you unexpectedly get stuck away from home, a safety kit could make all the difference. Items you may want to keep in your car include blankets, water, snack foods, a windshield scraper, extra windshield wiper fluid and antifreeze. We also recommend filling-up the gas tank so it doesn't go below half a tank.

Holiday Gift Ideas for Older Adults

So what do you buy for the person who already has a year's supply of aftershave, pot holders, argyle socks, a hat with your favorite team's logo and winter gloves? That is a question that plagues many people each holiday season. The following are some gift ideas that we have found to be quite well-received:

- A. **A is for Aides.** Give a gift of safety and convenience this holiday season. Consider items such as a big-button phone or remote control, large numbered clock, a magnifying glass, or a long-handled shoe horn. Or, might also arrange for a personal emergency response system (e.g., Direct Link), the installation of grab bars by the toilet and bath, or a hand-held shower head and bath seat.

- B. **B is for Baskets.** Surprise a loved one with a themed gift basket. Organize a collection of themed items together such as a basket of bath and relaxation products, a coffee-lovers basket, a card & board games basket, a fruit basket, a hobby basket, a movie basket, a basket of magazine and books, a sweet tooth basket.

- C. **C is for Coupons.** Create a series of coupons and staple them together into a personalized booklet. Coupons are a great way to let someone know how much you want to share and help make life easier. You might include coupons for things like "Good for the your favorite home cooked meal," "Good for dinner and a movie," "Good for house cleaning," "Good for one day's worth of spring clean-up and yard work" or "Good for a day of pampering including hair cut and style, manicure or pedicure," etc.

- D. **D is for Digital.** Help a loved one make the switch to digital television by giving that someone special an analog to digital converter box or purchase a digital television set and arrange for local service. Effective February 17, 2009, analog television sets that rely on "rabbit ears" or an antenna to receiving programming will no longer work. For more information about the switch to digital television visit www.dtv.gov.

For the person that already has digital TV, you might purchase a digital photo frame, load the first 50 or 100 favorite photos and set-it-up so it can be enjoyed right away.



HOME HELPERS® – *Making Life Easier* SM

Home Helpers offers personalized care services similar to the care and support that is often provided by family members. We tailor our services and schedules to address our clients' needs.

Home Helpers begins with a free in-home consultation, preferably at the care recipient's residence. This gives us the opportunity to...

- Meet the client and assess the situation.
- Make sure the requested services can be properly and safely performed.
- Ensure the Caregiver assigned possesses the personality, skill set and passion that best meet your loved one's needs.

Home Helpers' experienced and compassionate Caregivers are bonded, insured and carefully screened. Our Caregivers are employees, not subcontractors, thereby minimizing client liability.

To learn more about Home Helpers, call 630-323-7231 or visit us on the Web at www.MaryAndMikeCare.com.

Serving the Western Suburbs of
Chicago

Home Helpers
123 E. Ogden Avenue
Suite 102A
Hinsdale, IL 60521
630-323-7231

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Home Helpers
123 E. Ogden Ave.
Suite 102A
Hinsdale, IL 60521