

PRACTICAL INFORMATION FOR CAREGIVERS OF THE ELDERLY

TAKING CARE OF THE ELDERLY

AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE

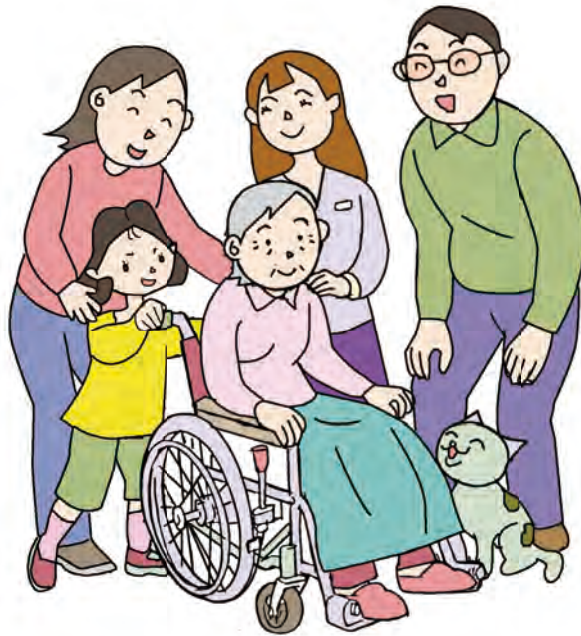
T M WANG

TRANSLATED FROM A CHINESE
VERSION THROUGH AN INITIATIVE OF
**CHARLES K. KAO FOUNDATION
FOR ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE**



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Taking

Care of the Elderly

An Illustrated Guide

Taking Care of the Elderly: An Illustrated Guide

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Foreword

With an aging society, many families may have an elderly member needing care at home. This would require certain knowledge and skills. There are various Chinese booklets and manuals on this topic, but there does not seem to be any equivalent English material available, appropriate and practical for the living environments in Asia. This book is very useful, with practical instructions and detailed diagrams illustrating the various caregiving needs for the elderly and disabled at home. We thank Dr. T.M. Wang for giving his kind permission for this book to be translated into English and Wan Li Book Company Limited for their professional partnership.



We hope this book will be beneficial to the English speaking community and also for the many families having foreign domestic helpers in their homes. Such a practical guide will be a valuable manual for the family.

Gwen Kao

Chairman

Charles K. Kao Foundation
for Alzheimer's Disease

Preface

This book refers to the original Chinese version is written for readers with elderly parents, disabled persons or children at home. We hope that this book will provide you with the assistance as you care for your family members on a regular or even daily basis.

This is an aging society that we live in. People with grey hair are seen everywhere. According to *Hong Kong Population Projections 2010-2039* published by the Census and Statistics Department of HKSAR in 2010, the population of Hong Kong is expected to increase to 8.89 million in 30 years, and Hong Kong will become the region where people have the highest life expectancy in the world (83.1 years for men and 90.1 years for women). However, the aging problem in Hong Kong is getting more and more serious. Among every 100 people, there will be 28 senior citizens, and the ratio of population over the age of 65 will rise from 13% in 2009 to 28% in 2039.

With no exception, we will all become old and feeble one day. Our body and health will go downhill, and we will find it increasingly difficult to take proper care of ourselves. There will be a stage when we become growingly dependent on others to care for us on a daily basis. Healthcare is different from medical care as the target recipients of healthcare services are those who are weak and vulnerable, and are yet to be in need of hospitalization. They need a multitude of services to cater for various aspects of their daily needs. Examples include the provision of daily basic care, such as cooking, feeding, washing laundry, bathing, helping them to toilet and tidying their rooms for them. Other instances include chatting with them, reading books and newspaper to them, taking them out for a walk, bringing them to hospitals, or even accompanying them to visit friends and relatives. The list of healthcare services goes on. In a word, caring for the elderly involves helping them with almost every aspect of their daily life. The aim is to improve their quality of life, helping them to live

with dignity and meeting their physical and psychological needs, as well as their need for social interaction.

Worldwide research studies show that over 80% of the aged prefer to spend their later years of life at home, as it is a setting familiar to them, and in the company with families and relatives. But sooner or later, they will inevitably lose the ability to take care of themselves in their daily life, either due to illness or because of aging. It will then become part of their lives to receive healthcare services, and part of the life of their family members or caregivers to care for them on a regular basis. In an aging society like ours, it is necessary for every citizen or member of the family to acquire some basic knowledge and skills in caregiving. This book is written with caregiving in a domestic setting in mind. The basic healthcare skills that a caregiver may need are presented with vivid and humorous illustrations provided. Our hope is that this book would be a practical guide that is easy to read and to be put into practice.

This is not a textbook per se. It is a handbook that aims to provide general healthcare knowledge and skills to members of the public. We hope that this handbook can serve as a reference to families and relatives who take care of the elderly at home, or caregivers who live with the elderly or work in elderly homes, or even volunteers.

This book emphasizes its practical use. Each chapter is an independent one and the readers can refer to the relevant chapter and call on the parts that they need. They will find guidance and tips that can readily be put into use. Readers may first skim through the book and then figure out for themselves the most convenient and practical ways to take care of the elderly. They can also share their caregiving experience with others so that we will see an improvement in the standard of caregiving services in the society.

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Chapter 1

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF CARING FOR THE ELDERLY

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1 The Basics Of Caregiving

Caregiving has to be primarily an act of love - it is love for one's family, for the feeble and aged, and for the humanity. Without exception, we all need to be cared for at certain phases of life. During infancy, childhood, adolescence and teenage, we are loved and looked after by our parents and adult family members. The elderly are no exception. They too need support and daily care when they come to a certain stage of aging.

From the cradle to the grave, no one can go through life without the support and care of others. Without such awareness and in the absence of love, caregiving will only be a grudgingly painful process that no one can truly do a good job.

Caring for the elderly is different from bringing up a teenager. The aged will inevitably become frailer over time and growingly dependent on others for their daily needs. They have to be taken care of on a long term basis. The task is tedious and repetitive, and sometimes calls for heavy manual and mental labour. Taking care of the elderly is never an easy task. A caregiver has to be mentally prepared for it.

To become a caregiver, you need to acquire not only basic healthcare knowledge and skills, but also to

learn to protect yourself mentally and physically. Your emotional health is also of great importance if you wish to sustain yourself as a long-term caregiver. You need interaction with others to help you to reduce stress and burden. You also need to protect yourself from undue physical exertion and back injuries. It is advisable that you make use of bodily mechanics and leverages to assist weight lifting.

The fundamental principle of elderly caregiving is to assist and encourage the elderly to lead a self-reliant life. Though they may not be fully competent, the elderly should nonetheless be encouraged to carry out the daily routines of eating and dressing by themselves. That may seem too harsh on the elderly but it is the only way to slow down the declines in their bodily functions. It will also enhance their rehabilitation, build up their confidence and help them to lead a dignified life.

This book is written on the assumption that the elderly to be cared for are hemiplegic patients. With training and encouragement, they will be able to handle to a certain extent the daily routines despite their present limitations. Caregivers are to stand by the elderly, giving them guidance and encouragement, and offer a helping hand when the need arises.

2 Be Mentally Prepared

♥ Accepting The Reality

It is inevitable that someday our frail elderly parents or aging spouses will need to be cared for. This may happen in any family. As their spouses or children, we need to be mentally prepared for the day to come when our loved ones will depend on us for their daily care. Our emotional reluctance to face the reality does not help. It would be better for us if we embrace the changes and cope with them positively.

♥ Designating A Caregiver

In a domestic setting, it will be important to designate a caregiver. If the whole family is involved, it may sometimes be a source of stress to the one being cared for. It will be more effective if a key person is designated as the primary caregiver who will take charge of the caring regime. At the very start, family members should come together to decide which approach to take. Only the approach that is acceptable to both the family members and the elderly should

be adopted. It should also be discussed how different family members can work together for the welfare of the elderly.

♥ Deciding On A Caring Regime

To start with, we need to have a clear idea of the current health conditions of the elderly and make a forecast of the next stage of development and prospect of rehabilitation. Then we can consider and decide

what the proper treatment, rehabilitative training and caring program are. It is vital that we observe an elderly to understand what he/she can do and cannot do. The results of the observation, progress of illness recovery and rehabilitation should be put down on proper record. The information is intended as a key reference for the next caregiver or doctor who can devise a caring program accordingly.

③ Preparing To Care For The Elderly

The ultimate goal of caring for the elderly is to help them to be self-reliant and to enable them to care for themselves. Though the caregivers may do a daily task more expeditiously than having the elderly to do it themselves, the elderly should be encouraged to complete it themselves. Excessive care, which may appear to be a gesture of kindness and love, will only do harm to the elderly and add burden to the family. It may even deprive the elderly of the desire to strive to live an independent life.

Lacking the determination to regain their self-reliance, those elderly who have received excessive care rarely respond positively to rehabilitation programs. Their bodily functions will decline at a faster pace as they often refuse to get out of beds. They will suffer muscular dystrophy, ankylosis (contractures), osteoporosis, organ failures and declines in brain function. Therefore, the appropriate care is the best care.



Encourage the elderly to feed themselves by using adaptive utensils.



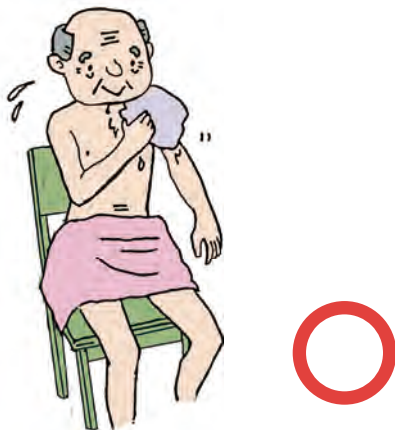
The elderly, who have restricted mobility in their fingers, are fed by others.



From using urinals and bedpans on bed, the elderly are gradually encouraged to get out of bed to use portable toilet bowls.



The elderly, who are restricted in their mobility, use diapers when having the urge to urinate and to have bowel movement.



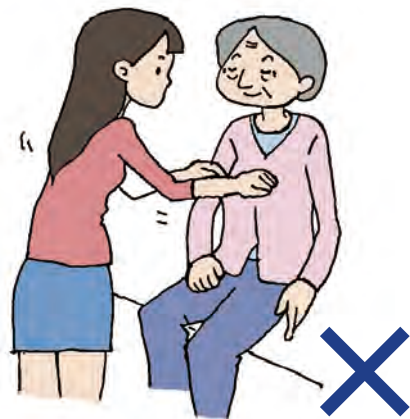
Scrub and bathe the bodily parts within the reach of the elderly by themselves.



The elderly, who have restricted their mobility in upper limbs, are scrubbed and bathed by caregivers.



Buttons are changed to velcros to enable the elderly to dress and button up by themselves.



The elderly, who have restricted mobility in their fingers, are dressed and buttoned up by caregivers.

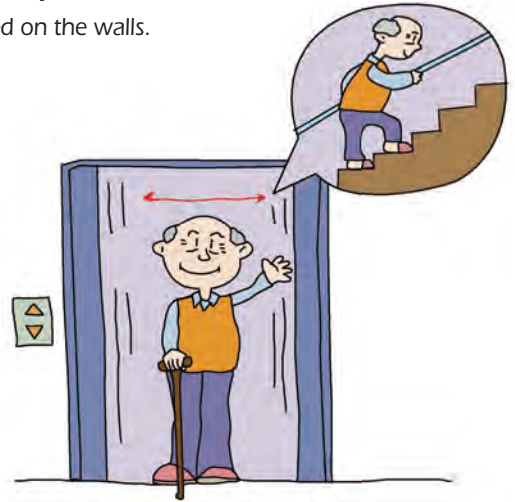
4 Modifying The Living Environment

♥ Objective Of Modification

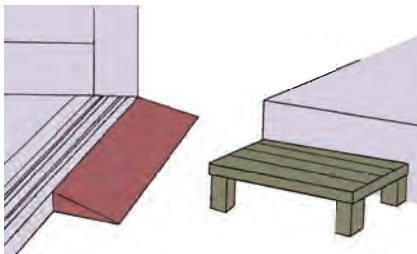
The fear of falls is common among the elderly. The elderly are susceptible to falls due to muscle weakness and poor balance. Falls can often have serious consequences for the elderly. For example, they may suffer bone fractures which cause them to be bedridden and unable to take care of themselves. Therefore, the need arises to modify and adapt their living environment for safety reasons and to prevent the elderly from falling or tripping over.

Researches show that door sills or those small stairs connecting the hallways and the living rooms are often the causes of falls for elderly, so are the clutters on the floors and electric or appliance cords. Besides, most elderly have poor eyesight, so if the lighting in the doorway or hallway is dim and the levelling of the floor is uneven, it becomes inevitable that they

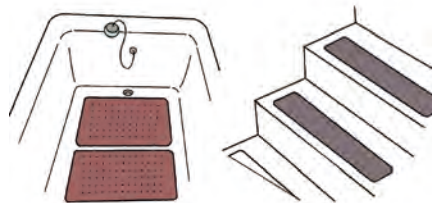
will fall. The safety of the home environment will be greatly improved if the elderly can see each step and stair clearly with sufficient lighting installed in the hallways and stairs, and handrails installed on the walls.



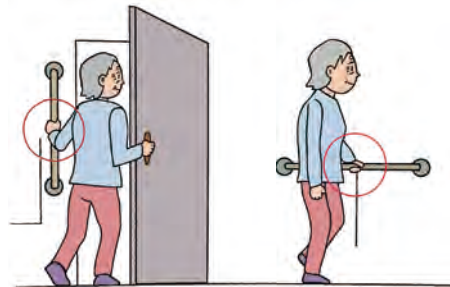
Principle Of Modification



To level the uneven floors To level the stairs so as to provide a fully accessible floor.



Slip-proof the environment To place non-slip mats inside bathtubs and staircases, and secure carpets to the floors with double-sided adhesive tapes.



Handrails To install handrails in bathrooms, lavatory, major hallways and stairways.



Illumination To install lights with high wattage to ensure that the hallways and stairways are sufficiently illuminated, and to use floor lamps.



Sliding Doors Doors with push-pull mechanisms should be avoided as the elderly tend to fall backwards when they pull the doors open. A sliding door should be used instead.



Clear the clutter and remove barriers Keep the floor clutter-free and reduce any barriers on the floors so that the elderly will not stumble over books, newspapers, power cables and other items scattered around. Tidying up the home on a regular basis to remove hazards.

♥ Plan Of Modification

A good knowledge of the elderly's physical conditions should be obtained in the first place when considering a plan to modify their residences. Their bodily heights, weights and other factors should also be taken into account. For adults and young people, a difference of one centimeter will not matter at all, but it will pose a difficulty to the elderly who may have to struggle simply to raise their legs.

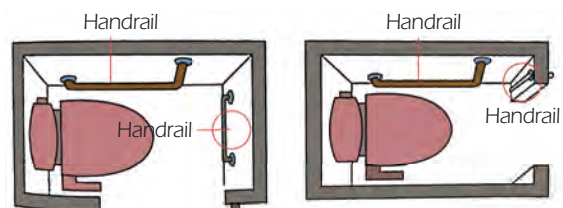
In the case of a full-scale reconstruction, the bedroom for the elderly should ideally be "located on the first floor, facing a good direction with long hours of sunshine".

It should also be "close to the lavatory" and be a room that will make it "conductive to communication with the family". They should never be left them in the innermost room of the house. When only minor changes are contemplated, priority should be given to the following important modifications: to level the different heights, to install handrails or grip bars, to apply non-slip mats, to ensure sufficient illumination, to convert to sliding doors. Moreover, frequent cleanup is necessary to keep the floors clutter-free.

Safety Measures For Different Rooms

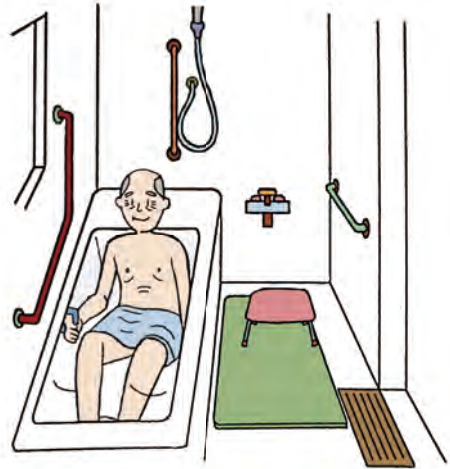
Lavatory

A sliding door or curtain should be used as the lavatory door with handrails installed. Though the door and the toilet bowl are at different positions, it basically suffices if an L-shaped handrail is installed next to the toilet bowl. An elderly can hold onto the vertical part of the L-shaped handrail when they are sitting down or standing up, and hold onto to the horizontal bar while they are seated.



Bathroom

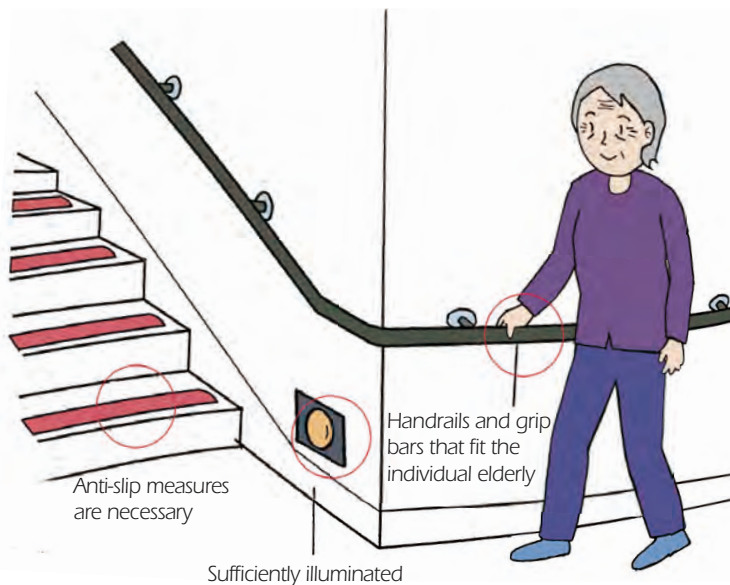
A wet and slippery floor in the bathroom is the biggest cause of falls. To prevent the elderly from falling, non-slip mats should be placed on the floor and inside the bathtub. In addition, handrails should be mounted near the door, on the bathroom walls and on the sides of the bathtub to reduce the risk of falling when the elderly are sitting down or getting up.



Hallways And Stairways

To start with, handrails should be installed in the hallways and the stairways. Handrails with a diameter more than 30 mm will offer a better grip, but it is also important to choose those with the shape, thickness or height that best fit the individual elderly. The hallways and stairways should be adequately illuminated and non-slip mats are also needed in the stairways.

With a safe and convenient environment and the necessary modifications, the caregivers will have more peace of mind when caring for the elderly.



5 Preventative Care

Preventative care measures are performed in an effort to prevent and delay the stage of aging when an elderly needs to be cared for. This section is written not only for the middle-aged and aged people who are potential recipients of healthcare services, but also their families. With advances in medical science and technology, improved social stability and better living standard, the life expectancy of the average people has increased continually.

Hong Kong people enjoy longevity. In 2011, the average life expectancy at birth for men was 80 years old and 87 years old for women, which represented approximately an 8-year increase for both men and women compared to their counterparts born 30 years ago. However, researches show that people in average live 6 to 10 years of their lives in poor health. A greater awareness of the significance of preventative measures is crucial in shortening that unhealthy period and the period when the seniors need to be cared for. Making early preparations, maintaining good lifestyles and adopting scientifically-sound ways to keep one's health will work to increase the number of self-reliant elderly who are healthy in their later years. Even for those elderly who need to be cared for, some physical trainings can substantially reduce their reliance on their caregivers and they can live a longer, better and much more meaningful life.

♥ Preventing The “Geriatric Syndromes”

Although “geriatric syndromes” are technically not an illness, it has a great impact on the quality of life for the elderly. By “geriatric syndromes”, we refer to proneness to falls, bedsores, a state of being bedridden, aspiration during swallowing, incontinence, malnutrition, self-isolation, insomnia, depression, oral discomfort, weakness in lower limbs and other signs of aging common among the aged people (usually described as doddering old age). In most cases, the syndromes

are considered as part of the normal aging process rather than illnesses and they are not fatal threats. Such syndromes, if left unattended, will aggravate and lead to pathological changes that render the elderly heavily dependent on healthcare, and thus affecting their mood and quality of life.



Tips

Preventative Care

Preventative care refers to a series of services and measures that the Japanese government launched in 2006 to help citizens lessen and delay their dependence on healthcare. With an alarmingly high percentage of aging population, the Japanese government made a series of fundamental policies to help its senior citizens to stay healthy, including promotion of healthcare policies and ideas, educating the general public as well as other efforts to encourage the senior citizens to do physical exercises, improve nutrition, enhance bodily functioning and to maintain oral hygiene. The objectives of the preventative care measures are to improve the elderly's quality of life, relieve burdens on the society, the government and the individuals, as well as to economize and make the best use of the medical and healthcare resources available.

Eight Things To Note In Preventative Care

1) Getting Proper Muscle Training

Muscle training is an effective way to help the elderly to stay agile and improve their physique. Strengthened muscles can also prevent falls. Undergoing training in some specific muscles (such as the pelvic floor muscles) can even prevent incontinence. Muscle training and stretching exercises should be performed under expert guidance to ensure safety and prevent injuries. Progress and benefits are often only to be reaped after a sustained period of training. When practicing sports such as Tai Chi, one has to remember to lift his center of gravity. When one is climbing up and down the stairs or going uphill or downhill, one should reduce speed to prevent straining or wearing out the knee joints.



3) Preventing Major Neurocognitive Disorder (Dementia)

In order to prevent dementia, the elderly are encouraged to practice memorization, to engage their attention and to organize and plan. Those three are the main brain functions that deteriorate once cognitive impairment sets in. Increasing brain usage and avoiding watching TV for a prolonged period of time can help to prevent the decline in cognitive skills of the brain. It is also important to get into the habit of walking and doing aerobic exercises to boost blood circulation in the brain. Other ways to delay cognitive decline of the brain include cultivating interests and hobbies that require finger movements, examples include drawing, practicing calligraphy, knitting, doing handicrafts and playing musical instruments. An active social life and interaction with other people can also help to avoid cognitive decline related to aging.

2) Preventing Malnutrition

A prolonged state of malnutrition will result in poor physique and accelerate the aging process. It may also trigger chronic diseases such as heart diseases. Therefore, the seniors should make sure that they have a balanced diet with a sufficient intake of proteins from both meat and vegetables.



4) Maintaining Good Oral Hygiene

We eat with our mouths. In addition, we vocalize, make facial expression and assist breathing with our mouths. In order to maintain these functions, we should make efforts to prevent tooth decay, periodontitis and take measures to keep dentures clean.

Daily oral care



5) Living A Good Lifestyle

The World Health Organization (WHO) has given a global advice on how to stay healthy. Their advice includes maintaining a regular daily routine of rest and work, “eating sensibly, getting the appropriate level of physical exercises, abstaining from smoking and limiting the amount of alcohol intake, as well as keeping a balanced and positive mindset”.

Good habits for living can help greatly to minimize the occurrence of lifestyle-related diseases (also known as illnesses related to living habits), examples of which include obesity, hyperlipidemia, hypertension, cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases, diabetes and cancer that adults are at high risk. Everyone will benefit from good living habits, but they are particularly important to the middle-aged and the aged. A psychological research shows that it only takes 24 repetitions to cultivate a habit. A good habit is formed when its momentum kicked in. It will shape our lives without we noticing it, and it will protect our health and well-being.

Denture cleaning



“Learn More”

The “8020 Initiative” In Japan

The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare of the Japanese government put forward the “8020 Initiative” a long time ago, promoting dental care and protection with the aim of retaining at least 20 healthy teeth up to the age of 80 (an average adult has 28 to 32 teeth). Their basis is that proper chewing of different types of food would require no less than 20 healthy teeth in the oral cavity. Dental health also has a direct impact on swallowing, digestion, articulation, and even pose and figure. For the elderly, dental problems will adversely affect their quality of life.

In 2001, this initiative was officially launched by the World Health Organization (WHO). Nowadays, most countries in the world have joined the campaign and launched a full-scale dental care program for all their citizens.

6) Maintaining A Positive Mindset

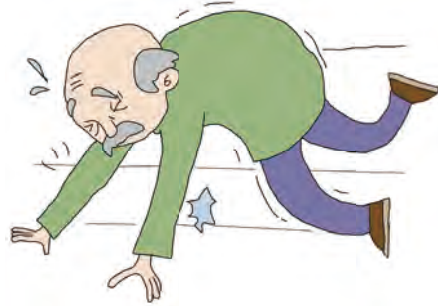
Keeping a positive mindset can mean a spectrum of things. It includes staying open-minded and accepting others, cultivating intellectual hobbies and interests, maintaining strong family ties, and being friends with people of different age groups. Participating in social services and helping other elderly are ways to enrich one's life and to help one stay upbeat and positive. The Chinese applaud the tradition of having "four generations living under one roof" and attach great value to keeping close family ties. For the elderly who do not live with their families, regular family gatherings and telephone calls are very important for the elderly need the warmth and support of their family to feel secure rather than "unloved".



7) Preventing Injuries And Diseases

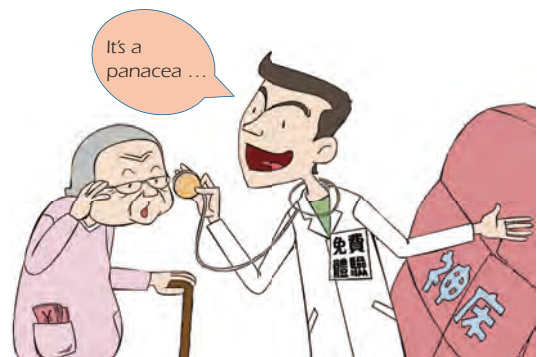
The elderly generally has a poor immunity against diseases and are more prone to injuries. Any injuries they suffer will not only take longer period of recovery, but may even cause disabilities that will greatly affect their quality of life or rob them of their independence and ability to care for themselves. For this reason, we need to be careful to prevent the elderly from sustaining injuries (such as getting hurt from climbs, falls, collisions or traffic accidents). Middle-aged men and those of old age are encouraged to change their habit of urinating in an upright position. They should especially be advised to adopt a sitting position at night when they feel the urge to urinate. The change is to avoid passing out or fainting caused by postural hypotension, which is a sudden drop of

blood pressure when a person stands up, and brain blood flow. Regular health check-ups are important to ensure timely treatment of minor illnesses, and help to prevent them from becoming serious health issues.



8) Beware Of Scams

In recent years, there has been a large number of seniors falling victims to scams, both at home and abroad. They go for small benefits, but usually get nothing in return but suffer great financial losses. They are misled by medical quacks who claim to offer treatments for ailments or means to maintain good health. The elderly patients suffer because they are denied early treatment for their illnesses, harming their health, delaying their recovery or even risking their lives. The scams can mean a severe blow to the mental state or financial state of the elderly who get hurt both psychologically and physically. It is crucial to stay alert to the fraudulent schemes. The elderly should be advised to rely on scientific findings to guide their healthcare issues and beware of swindlers.



6 Changes In The Physical And Psychological State Of The Elderly

Physical Changes

Brain

Gradual loss of brain cells, insomnia and poor memory

Ears

Gradual loss of hearing, especially high-frequency hearing.

Eyes

Visual impairment, blurred vision, but they are nonetheless more sensitive to the red color.

Teeth

Tooth decay and loss can lead to indigestion.

Heart

Deteriorating heart function, causing easy fatigue and shortness of breath.

Blood vessels

Arteriosclerosis, vascular stenosis and insufficient blood supply

Muscles

Reduced muscle strength and weakened functioning in pelvic floor muscles.

Bones

Osteoporosis and bone fragility that lead to risks of fractures.



Respiratory system

Decline in laryngeal function and reduced vital capacity.

Digestive system

Reduced secretion of digestive juices, decline in digestive function and absorption. Loss of appetite and decline in swallowing function.

Urinary system

Decline in renal and urinary bladder function. Frequent urination or urination problems due to enlargement of the prostate (prostatic hypertrophy).

Nervous system

Weaker reflexes

Acuity and senses

Decline in the overall acuity and senses, including visual, hearing, taste and tactile acuity.

Skin

Skin dryness, itchiness and dermatitis

Endocrine system

Decline in endocrine function.

♥ How To Cope With The Changes

As the aging process ensues, the various parts of our bodies undergo changes. Changes in the visual, audio, taste and other senses will bring about changes in one's preferences. The elderly are more prone to be taken ill as a consequence of the declines in their organs and immune systems. They are more likely to stumble over barriers such as stairs due to lessened mobility. Changes occur both physically and mentally. Some elderly may become increasingly dependent on others since they can no longer move freely, even if they used to be highly self-reliant. On the contrary,

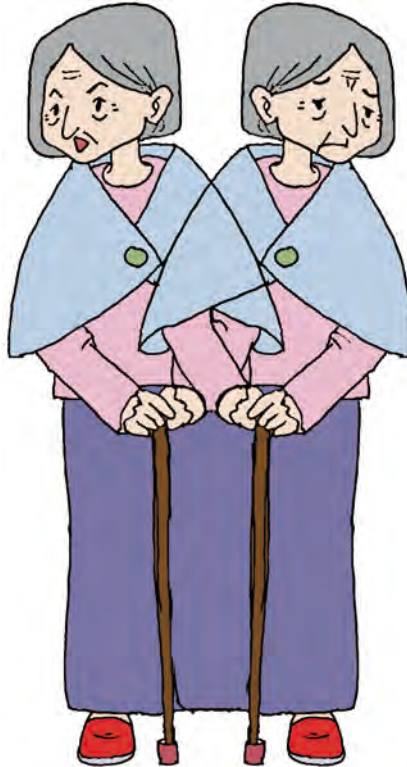
some elderly may be struck by loneliness and become growingly difficult to trust others. They may end up feeling even more isolated and depressed. All of these changes are common among the seniors.

To build up trust, a caregiver need to first have a grasp of the personality and thoughts of an elderly. It should also be understood that as a person grows old, physical and psychological changes are inevitable. Such an understanding is a prerequisite to establishing a harmonious relationship with the elderly.

Psychological Changes

Dominance

- Dwelling on the past memory
- Becoming self-centered
- Becoming stubborn
- Becoming impatient and irritable
- Resistance to new ideas
- Being always in the right
- Being obsessive and coercive
- Meddling with others businesses
- Fond of giving orders to young people



Vulnerabilities

- Losing self-confidence
- Forgetful of recent events
- Heightened sense of insecurity
- Always worried and scared
- Whining
- Less independent
- Pessimistic
- Afraid of being bothered
- Evading responsibilities

♥ Solutions

If we have some contact with an old person, we will find a double-sided personality in him/her. The same person will be “stubborn and dominant” in some cases and “irresolute and vulnerable” in others. There seems to be a shift of mind from time to time. They either feel strong about defending one’s self-worth or become unconfident in the self-defense.

Different people have different strong personalities (see above) and may become angry all of a sudden when things get worse. It is more of an age-related change than a personality, and if we offer gentle care, we can build deeper trust in our relationship with the elderly.

Methods of Caregiving at Three Levels



TAKING CARE OF THE ELDERLY

THE NECESSARY KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS FOR AN AGING SOCIETY

An aging population poses a huge challenge to many societies all over the world. In Hong Kong, it is said that 80% of elderly adults prefer to live at home.

This illustrated guide introduces the basics of caring for the elderly to those families who have the need to look after old people at home.

It provides useful tips to the elderly to encourage and enable them to care of themselves in their daily lives so as to help delay the degeneration of their bodies and recover their health.



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