



Home Alone

A guide to home safety for the elderly

Simple, affordable changes you can make to support your elderly parents to continue living independently.



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introduction

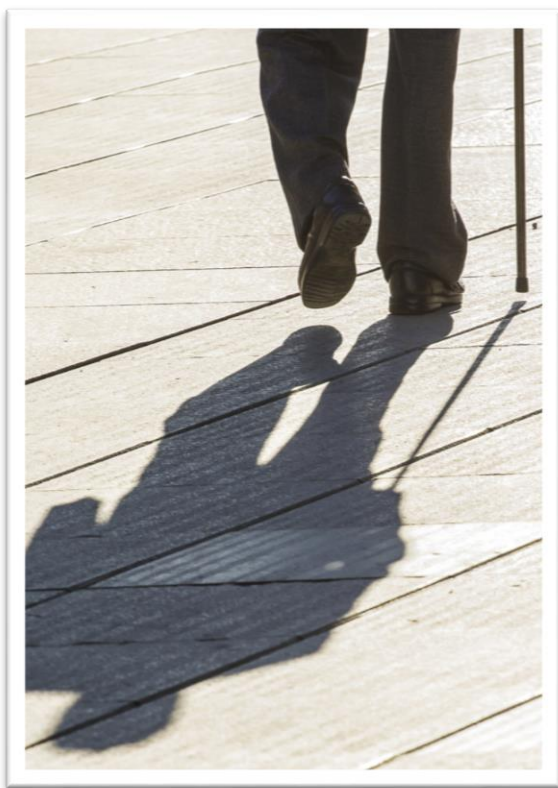
you're not alone

You are likely reading this guide because, like me, you have an ageing parent.

As I watch my parents age, I struggle with knowing when to step in to assist them and when I might be interfering with their wish for independence.

“We’re fine. There’s no need to worry,” is the usual reaction I get when I enquire.

Old age is the most difficult phase of life and has to be accepted without choice. We adult children don’t always realise our parents’ need for more support. It’s not easy to let go of who they once were, and accept what now is.



It’s important to recognise the signs that indicate more help is needed so they can be supported to continue to live independently, if that is what they wish.

Many adult children feel they are able to take on the full time role of caring for their parent themselves, which is quite a responsibility to do alone. It takes an inordinate cost on a person’s life and health, especially with the additional demands of paid employment and caring for one’s own family. It can all get quite exhausting.

'Help' is not an easy subject to discuss with this stoic generation of elder folk who'd rather give than receive.

They are a proud generation, who are used to 'making do'. Its only when a crisis happens, like a serious fall, is 'help' accepted.

Nevertheless, if we want to avoid the crisis, and keep them living safe and comfortably in their own home, adjustments will need to be made.

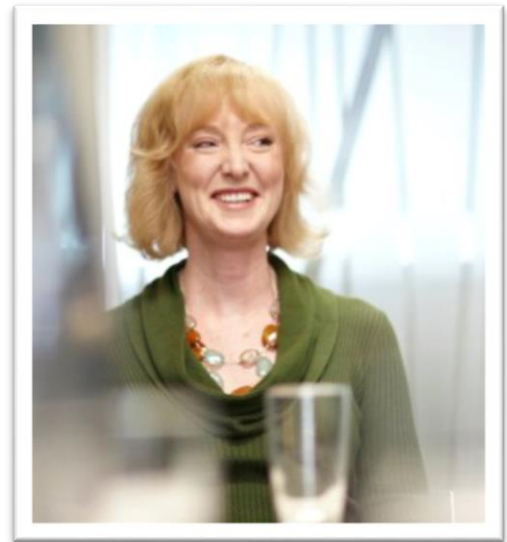
Routine is important to elder people. They don't like to change things, but just like old age, there's little choice.

In this book I've highlighted some of the simple and easy things you can do.

From the Better Caring family to yours,

Jane

Jane Floyd
Chief Operating Officer
Better Caring Pty Ltd



CHAPTER ONE

HOME SWEET HOME

there's no place like home for growing old

"The stairs are getting hard."

"Opening a can of soup every night gets a bit boring."

"Taking care of my dog is what keeps me going."

"I've lived here 45 years, they can take me out of here in a box."

Contrary to what people think, most elderly people aren't living in nursing homes – they're living at home and want to stay there.

Ninety-five percent of elderly people living at home say they want to stay out of a nursing home as long as possible. Of course they do! Don't we all want to live in our own homes?

Research related to healthy ageing clearly indicates that living at home has many social, economical, physical and psychological benefits.

The good news is that with the right help, it is possible to live at home despite frailty or disability. People can minimise the impact of the physical problems of ageing by getting fit and making simple changes in their home.

With the support of a carer, most older people can easily be enabled to live independently in safety and comfort.

Planning ahead is important but may be difficult, as you never know when an elder person's needs might change. And everyone's situation is different.

Start by looking out for any illnesses like diabetes or emphysema that could make it difficult for someone to get around or take care of themselves.

Help getting showered and dressed in the morning, fixing a meal, or remembering to take medication may be all that is needed for someone to remain living in their own home.

Formal care helps elderly people live independently, to be less burdensome to relatives and to avoid nursing home care.

CHAPTER TWO

WARNING SIGNS HELP IS NEEDED

what's normal when it comes to ageing?

It's a gut feeling, a gnawing thought that doesn't go away. Little shocks of acknowledgement when visiting your elderly loved one that ring the alarm "all is not well!" Acknowledging the frailty of your parent is a slow dawning, but then something happens and suddenly the scales fall from our eyes and we see reality.

Before your loved one gets into trouble, check out these **warning signs** that may indicate they need help at home:

- The fridge is nearly empty or contains spoiled food
- Weight loss or poor diet
- Unopened mail is piling up, late payment notices
- The house isn't as clean as organised as it usually is
- Noticeable decline in grooming habits and personal care
- Unexplained bruising
- Trouble getting up from seated position
- Difficulty walking, balance and mobility
- Uncertainty and confusion when performing once-familiar tasks
- Unpleasant body odour
- Infrequent showering and bathing
- Loss of interest in hobbies and activities
- Changes in mood or extreme mood swings
- Unexplained dents and scratches on the car
- Loss of interest in hobbies and activities

discussion tips

talk about it together,
the sooner the better



No matter how much you love your parent and how much energy you have, there will come a time when caring for them on your own gets to be too much.

- ✓ Include other family members, where appropriate
- ✓ Put yourself in their shoes, see things from their perspective
- ✓ Realistically define the situation and keep it factual
- ✓ Outline what you think are their capabilities and limitations
- ✓ Allow them to respond and make sure you listen, listen, listen
- ✓ Discuss their current needs and possible future needs
- ✓ Listen to their concerns and express your concerns
- ✓ Talk about care options, costs and financial sources
- ✓ Agree on a solution together, don't rush it
- ✓ Take a break or postpone the discussion if it gets stressful
- ✓ Offer to 'trial' home care for a few weeks – Better Caring has care workers from \$25 per hour
www.bettercaring.com.au



Elder Safety Warning Signs: bruising, confusion, vagueness, missing important appointments, neglect of personal grooming, forgetting medication or taking more than prescribed doses.



We should always love and cherish our parents ... sometimes we are so busy growing up ourselves, we forget that they too are growing older.

CHAPTER THREE

HOW TO BREAK THE SILENCE

let's talk about it

Most elderly are comfortable with the way things are. So, you may be wondering how to start such a conversation? Well, that will depend on your situation and your relationship. My suggestions are:

Mum, given your health and what the doctor told us, I think we need to talk about how we can better support you at home.

Dad, what about getting someone in for a few hours a week to help with ...?

Discuss changes with them before you do anything, but make sure they know that any changes are to make life easier for them.

You may conclude that mum or dad should move into your home—or even a nursing home. But this major change of life deserves thoughtful consideration and these drastic options are difficult to undo. A better solution is to hire a private in-home care worker who can bridge the gap between maintaining your parent's independence and what you and the family can provide.

Open and honest discussion with your parent and other family members is the essential first step. This will allow everyone to share their views and will help you decide how best to proceed. Active, positive communication among all family members is the building block to a strong support system for an older parent.

Although some of these discussions may be very difficult and emotional, they are too important to ignore. Together, the family—including your parent—will need to talk about:

- ✓ the level of care needed
- ✓ finances – how and who will pay
- ✓ each person's role
- ✓ changes in lifestyle

Be open with the facts – be gentle but don't lie or hide information to protect your parent, it will only hurt him/her in the long run.

Don't expect to come to a resolution immediately. End the conversation when your parent becomes tired or overwhelmed. Take it up with them later.

CHAPTER FOUR

HOW MUCH HELP IS NEEDED?

what's needed?

now and in the future

As your parent gets older, his/her care needs will change, and in most cases become more challenging. It's essential to develop a strategy for providing care, and this requires both practicality and planning. Consulting with a aged care expert may be beneficial as you consider your options and what you will and will not be able to do for your parent.

- Evaluate whether your parent needs constant supervision or assistance throughout the day and how this might be provided.
- Determine which activities of daily living (such as eating, bathing, toileting) your parent can do independently.
- Determine your comfort level for providing personal care such as bathing or changing an adult incontinence pad.
- Evaluate your own health and physical abilities to help decide if you are able to provide care for your parent.
- Explore the availability of services such as in-home care, adult day services, meal delivery, a friendly visitor program.
- Investigate long-term arrangements and options if living with your parent will not work or is not your choice.
- Determine the type of medical care that will be needed by your parent, and whether appropriate physicians and services—including transportation services—are available in your community.
- As time goes by, expect changes in your parent's medical or cognitive condition.

CHAPTER FIVE

ESSENTIAL HOME MODIFICATIONS

make home safe: easy things you must do

There's no place like home, but that doesn't mean it's safe!

Falls are the number one threat to the health and independence of elder people and can significantly limit their ability to remain self-sufficient.

Falls are preventable. There are simple and easy strategies that you can use to reduce falls and help elder people live better, and longer.

Each year, one in every three adults aged over 65 falls.

Falls can cause moderate to severe injuries, such as hip fractures and head traumas, and can increase the risk of early death.

The Facts

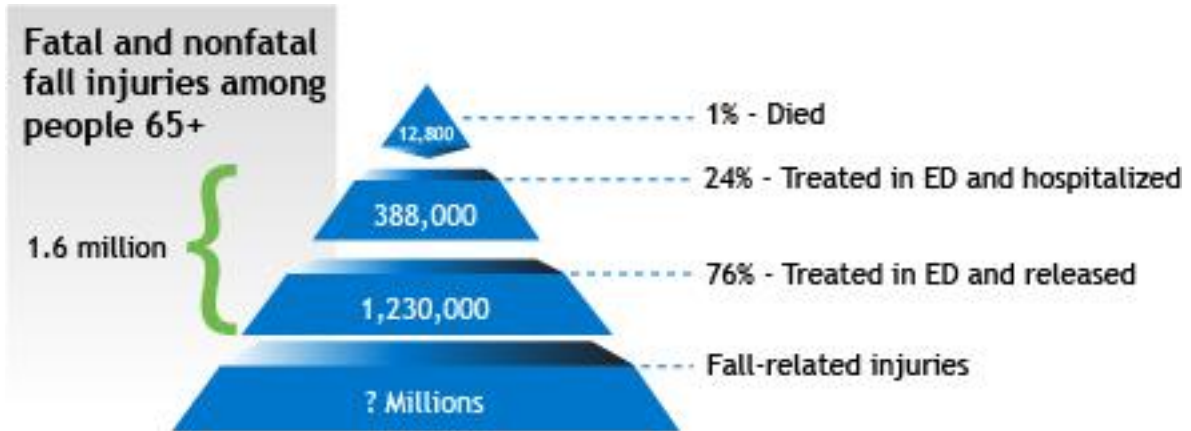
- 40% of trips to the hospital are caused by falls and other accidents in the home.
- Falls are the leading cause of death and injury in the older population.
- 53% of home accidents experienced by elders could be prevented.
- 57% of doctors say the most common response from families when an elder person visits the hospital emergency due to a fall is, "I was afraid something like this would happen."
- 89% of elders have done nothing to prepare their homes for ageing.

5 tips to avoid falls



- 1. Regular exercise** - focus on exercises that increase leg strength, improve balance, and get more challenging over time. Tai Chi is especially good.
- 2. Medications review** — ask the doctor or pharmacist to review both prescriptions and over-the-counter medicines. Some medications cause side effects such as dizziness or drowsiness.
- 3. Eye examination** - Have eyes checked by an eye doctor at least once a year and update glasses to maximize vision.
- 4. Modify the home** - reduce trip hazards by installing grab bars inside and outside the tub or shower and next to the toilet, adding stair railings and improving lighting in the home. See Chapter 4.
- 5. Top up the calcium** - To lower hip fracture risk, take calcium and vitamin D from food and/or supplements, ask the doctor to screen for osteoporosis.

Impact of falls



- ✓ Falls are the leading cause of death due to injury among the elderly
- ✓ Tens of thousands of elderly people die each year from fall-related injuries
- ✓ Falls account for 40% of all nursing home admissions
- ✓ 40% of those admitted to nursing homes never return to living independently in their homes, and 25% of them die within the first year

Getting help quickly after a fall improves survival chances by 80%

HOME SAFETY 'TO DO' LIST

- Remove throw rugs and loose mats. Make sure larger rugs are not rippled or torn.
- Remove extension cords and other potential tripping hazards such as books, clothes and shoes from pathways.
- Move low tables and other furniture to make it easier to move around the house.
- Make sure chairs are the right height and have sturdy armrests.
- Check to ensure light fixtures have at least 60-watt bulbs and that nightlights are available in hallways, bathrooms and bedroom.
- Make sure handrails in the home are sturdy and in good repair.
- Use non-skid mats in the bathtub and on shower floors and install grab bars next to the toilet or shower if necessary.
- Keep medications and other items needed within easy reach.

CHAPTER SIX

FINAL WORD

final word

with support & modifications home is safest place

My personal experiences of hospital and nursing home care for elderly people has taught me one very important and disturbing lesson: our health institutions do a very poor job looking after our vulnerable elderly, especially in comparison to how we care for children.

Children have parents watching over them, keeping them safe. But in institutionalised care, the elderly are generally alone, frail and helpless.

I was painfully reminded of this lapse in care when an elderly friend spent many weeks in institutional care while he recovered from a 'hospital acquired' infection. I found it shocking and overwhelming to see many of his elderly fellow patients being ignored, talked down to and disrespected.

Children are never treated in this way, their call bells are answered quickly and if they are crying due to pain, they do not cry for very long.

According to an Ipsos-Reid poll of 1,000 people over the age of 45, "6 in 10 have little faith that hospitals and nursing institutions have the resources to handle the needs of an ageing population."

But there is a solution: home care. Almost everything that can be done for a person in a nursing home can also be done in their home, with the assistance of a compassionate carer – whether that be a family carer or a private service, or a blend of both.

Everyone deserves the opportunity to live their life to the fullest extent they are capable, and to feel optimism and joy in their lives. The best way we can create that for our elders is undoubtedly: care at home.



There's lots of assistive technologies on the market today:

- ✓ GPS tracking devices
- ✓ fall detectors
- ✓ emergency call pendants
- ✓ smoke alarms
- ✓ gas detectors
- ✓ sensor lights



Caregiving often calls us to lean into love we didn't know possible."

— Tia Walker



THE SOLUTION IS BETTER CARE AT HOME

'Home' is not just where we live, it's a place that provides comfort and safety, where we can relax and be ourselves, surrounded by the things that remind us of who we are, and where we belong.

That's why Better Caring helps people who have a disability or are frail to continue living safely at home where they're most happy and comfortable. We offer families the freedom to relax in the knowledge they're in good hands.

Better Caring is an affordable solution that allows clients to choose and directly hire their own care worker, starting at \$25 per hour. It is a more affordable option than a traditional home care agency, which charge fees upwards of \$45 per hour and they offer little choice of care worker.



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Better care starts here

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