



Making *Life Easier*™

Easing Into Life Transitions

People who hope to complete a marathon don't just wake up one day and decide to run the race. Instead, they start a training regiment and ease into it by gradually increasing the distances they run in order to build up strength and stamina. This same approach of "easing in" can be wise for a variety of life transitions, including retirement, caregiving and driving cessation. Let's briefly look at each of these.

Retirement – Life is often structured around work. Regardless of what shift people work, the hours they sleep, the times they eat, and the places they go are often determined by work schedules. It is quite common for people to find an abrupt transition into retirement filled with uncertainty. As they depart from a lifelong career to start a new chapter in life, what may initially sound glamorous often becomes dull. As a result, retirees often turn to volunteering, mentoring, and pursuing passions to rediscover a sense of purpose their careers used to provide them. While many Americans follow a "work one day, retire the next" approach to retirement, many older European workers ease into retirement by gradually working shorter and fewer days. This approach has been found to help them become accustomed to a new way of life and create a smooth transition for coworkers.

Did you know?

- Over 80% of people ages 65 and older have one or more chronic illnesses?
- Chronic illnesses often lead to functional limitations?
- Over 40% of older adults struggle with independent living activities?

Caregiving – Instead of waiting until a catastrophic event occurs before pursuing changes to *make life easier*, often the best way for elder loved ones to embrace change is to ease in to it. Engaging the services of a caregiver to help around the house a few hours a week is often a great way for people to grow accustomed to having someone to help with daily activities. As life becomes increasingly difficult, caregiving services can be expanded upon.

"Medical conditions and the functional challenges they present often cause everyday activities associated with independent living and personal care to become increasingly difficult," said Emma Dickison, president of Home Helpers. "In addition, hospitalization is often the catalyst that forces people to make changes when they are discharged." Knowing older adults place a high value on their independence, support from family and/or professional caregivers is a great way to extend independence and avoid isolation.

Driving Cessation – As a result of functional limitations, many people choose to self-regulate their driving by avoiding highways, rush hour traffic or driving at night. Driving signifies independence for many people, and seeking alternative forms of transportation can be uncomfortable for those who are used to driving. Again, ease in to it. Seek carpooling opportunities and rely on family, friends and/or professional caregivers to provide rides to appointments – chances are a person may enjoy the extra company these options provide. If public transportation is available and convenient, it may be worth exploring as an option to gain familiarity and reduce driving. If the time comes when driving become unsafe, the transition will likely be easier.

Is There Writing on the Wall?

Rarely do people face situations that are completely unexpected. Instead, as the saying goes, there is often *writing on the wall* that indicates a future situation or challenge. These subtle hints signal to us that we should anticipate a change. As you look ahead to 2010, is there writing on the wall indicating future changes or life transitions?

Based on your unique situation, what are some issues you are likely to encounter over the next year?

- Are you envisioning a career change that would compel you to increase your networking and update your resume?
- Do you anticipate downsizing your home now that your children are grown and a larger home is no longer practical?
- Could this be the year your loved one hangs up the car keys for his/her own safety and the safety of others?
- Is this the year increased assistance may be needed based on deteriorating health and difficulties with independent living and/or personal care?

If you see writing on the wall, take the time to proactively prepare for the inevitable. Likewise, if you see others struggling, express your concerns in a caring and gentle manner. They may have blind spots and not realize what could be obvious to you.

America's population is aging at record rates. If you are not already providing care or support for a family member or friend, chances are you will soon. Caregiving has quickly become an expected life event, just like getting married, having children, working and retiring. Is there writing on the wall that might suggest it is appropriate to start taking a more active role in a loved one's life?

Practical Stress Reduction

Stress is both universal and individual – everyone encounters stress; however, the source of stress and the approach to managing it varies by person. Words commonly used to define the term stress include pressure, anxiety, anger, strain, tension and uncertainty. Stressful situations run the gamete from daily hassles, such as driving in rush hour traffic and getting the kids ready for school, to life transitions, including moving, starting a new job or the death of a loved one.

Stress emerged as a topic of broad interest in the mid-60s when researchers concluded specific life events can be measured to determine the impact of stress on a person's life. What is now referred to as the Social Readjustment Rating Scale proved to be a means to measure stress and estimate the amount of change or readjustment necessary to cope.

If you have heard the term caregiver stress you might imagine there is often tremendous stress associated with caring for aging or ill family members. Caregiver stress is often due to such factors as dealing with uncertainty, facing conflict or disagreement between family members, trying to balance multiple responsibilities and more.

In addition to some well-known and proven stress reduction techniques, such as deep, slow breathing, muscle relaxation, exercise, and expressing one's thoughts and feelings, there are other ways to help ease stress associated with family caregiving.

“As we transition from one of the most stressful seasons to begin a new year, I hope you find the following practical insights and tips to be helpful in reducing or managing stress,” said Emma Dickison, president of Home Helpers.

Capacity – Family members generally have good intentions; however, commitments such as family, work, coaching/community service make it difficult for caregivers to give their loved one’s their full attention at all times. A common complaint is that there are not enough hours in the day. Many caregivers expect to be needed on a part-time basis, but their involvement may quickly become full-time (and stressful). Our advice is to know your limits. As the [Caregiver Bill of Rights](#) indicates, it is important for family caregivers to recognize their responsibilities as well as their limitations. Caregivers that overextend themselves and become exhausted are of little value to the person for whom they are caring. Look for ways to share the responsibility with family, friends and home care agencies, such as Home Helpers.

Complement – Care receivers are generally most receptive to help and support when it is in harmony with their wishes and preferences. Likewise, some of the most stressful situations occur when family members impose their own values or think they know what’s best. We find that one of the easiest ways to reduce or minimize conflict (stress) is to ask and honor a loved one’s expressed wishes.

Compassion – Take time to consider the feelings of the care recipient. Many older adults indicate they do not want to be a burden on their family or friends, are frustrated by functional losses, and are used to doing things a certain way. Understanding life from the perspective of the care receiver can be quite valuable and help caregivers approach situations with increased compassion and understanding.

Companionship – While many family members focus on the tasks, such as preparing meals, providing a rides to appointments, helping to sort medications and lending a hand around the house, be careful not to overlook the relational aspects associated with caregiving. As Andy Rooney is quoted as saying, “Under everyone’s hard shell is someone who wants to be appreciated and loved.”

HOME HELPERS – *Making Life Easier* Home Helpers offers quality non-medical and personal care* and companionship services similar to the care and support often provided by family members. Our flexible care plans are tailored to fit our clients’ specific needs and budgets. To learn more about Home Helpers, call (800) 216-4196, ext. 105, or visit us online at www.HomeHelpers.CC (as in **Compassionate Caregivers**). *Compassionate Care* is a bi-monthly newsletter produced by Home Helpers. We hope you found this edition to be informative and helpful.

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