

THE MESSENGER

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Making the Most of Your Time When Visiting a Loved One in a Skilled Nursing Facility

The best thing you can do for a loved one who lives in a long-term care facility is to visit as often as possible. This lets your loved one know you still care about their well-being. A visit from you also help break up their routine and may even give them some bragging rights with their fellow residents (“Did you see the handsome man who visited me today? That’s my son!”).

Some people are uncomfortable about visiting a loved one in nursing facility, because they don’t know what to do while there or they fear running out of things to say. But a visit from you provides another opportunity to bond with your loved one and deepen your relationship. Here are some tips to help you make the most of your visit.

Plan an activity

If your loved one is able, plan to go out to a restaurant or museum. If they aren’t able to leave the facility, bring a board game or jigsaw puzzle with you so you can connect through an activity. If they enjoy books, but can’t read easily because of a chronic condition, take a book to read to them.

Visit when your loved one is feeling their best

Many nursing facility residents have the most energy in

the morning, after a good night’s rest or after a midday meal. Choosing the right time will help ensure a successful visit.

Take a pet

Animals can be very healing. They have been shown to lower blood pressure and, for those living with dementia, to reduce agitation and improve positive social behavior. Make sure the facility allows pets. If they do, this can be the highlight of your loved one’s day!

Share a meal

Dining together is a good way to see what your loved one eats on a daily basis and is usually highly conducive to connection. If there’s a lull in the conversation, you can always talk about the food you’re eating.

Bring a gift

Everyone enjoys getting gifts. This could include a CD of their favorite music, photos of the grandkids, board games, homemade treats, or a warm blanket. Still not sure what to give? Ask the staff if they have any suggestions.

Don’t let dementia be a barrier

Conversations with people living with dementia can



Continued on page 4

Social Media Safety for Seniors



How many holiday cards did you receive this year, compared with a decade ago? Fewer people are composing a newsy Christmas letter these days, because their friends all saw their vacation pictures and news of that new grandchild on Facebook. Seniors who don't use social media can end up feeling left out.

Today more than a third of older adults are on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Nextdoor and other social media platforms, and that number is growing. How is this new way of communicating affecting the way we age today?

Last year researchers from Penn State University conducted a study on the effect of social media on older adults. They found that using these sites could be a good thing for seniors, especially those who were at risk of isolation. Being part of a social network helped these seniors feel part of a larger community. "This is important, especially for older adults who might be aging in place, because they have mobility constraints that limit their ability to socialize," reported study author S. Shyam Sundar. "Certain things you do on Facebook can give you gratification, like fulfilling the needs for activity, having interactions with others, having a greater sense of agency, and building community."

But other studies have warned of pitfalls. In 2018, researchers from the University of Pennsylvania found that the more time we spend on social media, the more likely we are to experience depression and anxiety ... and even an increased sense of loneliness. Penn State's Sundar says that developers of social media networks should consider the needs of older users, and create features that enhance the sense of identity and community of seniors while also protecting their privacy. Let's hope that happens! But meanwhile, there's a lot individuals can do to make social

media a positive, safe experience.

- 1. Check your stress level.** According to a study from Pew Research Center, spending a lot of time on social media can be very stressful. Said the researchers, "Stress might come from maintaining a large network of Facebook friends, feeling jealous of their well-documented and well-appointed lives, the demands of replying to text messages, the addictive allure of photos of fantastic crafts on Pinterest, having to keep up with status updates on Twitter, and the 'fear of missing out' on activities in the lives of friends and family." If this describes you, it might be time for a social media time-out.
- 2. Learn about the latest scams, and make "suspicious" your default mode.** Second only to technical problems, fraud and criminal activity are the top challenges to seniors online. Scammers are ruthless and smart, always coming up with new ways to part us from our money and personal data. Remember that if you don't know a person in real life, be cautious. A crook can impersonate the IRS, Microsoft, a debt collector, an antivirus company, Social Security, Medicare—even someone you know, as in the infamous "grandparent scam." Be sure your antivirus software is up to date, and be cautious with your personal data.
- 3. Get your tech support ducks in a row.** Not all of us are "techy." Seniors who didn't grow up with digital technology may need a fair amount of help to keep everything up and running. Maybe a family member would commit to helping, either in person or remotely. Or sign up for a tech support service from a reputable company. These professionals can help with software installation, remove a virus, tune up your computer and provide all-around peace of mind.
- 4. Learn about social media etiquette.** If you're just getting the hang of social media, ask an experienced user to help you with everything from your privacy settings to online etiquette—for example, the comments function is not the place for a private chat, and nothing you post online is really private. One more tip—don't feed the trolls! It's easy to get sucked into negative interactions online, and discussions can become far more toxic than they would if you were sitting across the table from the person.

Continued next page

Aging & Caregiving in the News

Information and updates from across the country and around the world

In this issue:

- Seniors are seriously impacted by wildfires

Online:

- Exercise protects the health of Alzheimer's caregivers
- Women are less likely to receive CPR

Seniors Most Affected by Wildfires

The summer of 2018 will be remembered for the horrific wildfire season in the West that killed hundreds of people and destroyed the homes of thousands. This event also serves as a reminder that the majority of people who lose their lives during wildfires are older adults. Mobility, cognitive and sensory challenges make it harder for seniors to learn about a fire and to evacuate promptly. When older adults are displaced by fire, it's also much harder for them to rebuild their lives. And their health can suffer: If they evacuate to a shelter, they are more susceptible to infections that spread in a crowded living situation, and wildfire smoke is dangerous for people with heart problems and respiratory disorders. Seniors who live in a fire-prone area should create a plan for receiving alerts, and evacuating safely to a shelter that can meet their medical needs. Have help lined up well ahead of time.

Source: Real Properties in association with IlluminAge Communication Partners; copyright 2018 IlluminAge.

5. Don't fall for fake health news. Advertisements posing as news items are common on social media. And many opportunistic “news sites” make money from advertisers for every curious user they lure to their site. This is relatively harmless if a site is tempting you with nothing worse than one of those “The Best Ice Cream in Every State” articles that makes you click through 50 different screens, each with different ads. But many sites pretend to share legitimate medical advice. They often use clickbait-style headlines, such as “Doctors Don't Want You to Know This Secret,” or “Throw Away Your Diabetes Medication and Eat This Instead,” with sensationalistic health claims. Following their advice could harm your health. Don't believe it—and don't share it.

6. Protect your sleep. You've probably heard that the bright light emitted by smartphones, computers and tablets can disrupt our sleep. And that's not all. University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine experts say social media interactions tempt us to stay up later than we should. When we finally do turn in, we might toss and turn thinking of a heated comment thread or news article we just read. And it can be a cycle. Said study author Dr. Brian A. Primack, “Difficulty sleeping may lead to increased use of social media, which may in turn lead to more problems sleeping. This cycle may be particularly problematic with social media, because many forms involve interactive screen time that is stimulating and rewarding and, therefore, potentially detrimental to sleep.”

7. Don't neglect your IRL (in real life) relationships. Studies show that people can be so engrossed in social media interaction that it overshadows their flesh and blood friendships and family relations. Experts coined the term “phubbing”—short for “phone snubbing”—to describe what most of us witness on a regular basis: a get-together of people during which some attendees are focused on their phone, not the gathering. They're more intent on posting a picture of their meal than actually enjoying it. “When you're not busy getting sucked into clickbait social media, you're actually spending more time on things that are more likely to make you feel better about your life,” said University of Pennsylvania psychologist Melissa G. Hunt. “In general, I would say, put your phone down and be with the people in your life.”

Some people are swearing off social media, but for most of us, these platforms are here to stay. Still, it's important not to overdo it, and to make time for real life. If you're feeling stressed, if you have that compelled-to-post-a-selfie-or-it-didn't-happen impulse, or if internet trolls are getting you down, turn off your device periodically and focus on other things. You may find that this restores a healthier balance between the online world and real life.

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Visiting a Loved One, *continued from page 1*

be challenging, especially if they have difficulty tracking the conversation. That's when a planned activity can come in handy. Focusing on a specific task may help you connect without the need for conversation.

Reminisce about the past

If your loved one is living with memory loss, this is a good way to get them to remember. Long-term memories tend to last longer than short-term ones and talking about good times of the past allows your loved one to be fully engaged in a conversation. Remembering fond moments may also lift their spirits.

Celebrate your relationship

Whatever challenges your loved one is facing, you still have a relationship, which can continue to be nurtured and celebrated. While it's never easy seeing someone you love growing more frail or forgetting special memories from their past, try to acknowledge that the person is still a lovable human being in need of compassion. Your willingness to connect with them helps them have a life that is still joyful and full of purpose.

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