

# *CAREGIVING* *for SENIORS*

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**A Practical Guide**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Edition**

Published by:  **cwa**  
Caregiving Welfare Association



**Published by:  
Caregiving Welfare Association  
Blk 3, Ghim Moh Road #01-294  
Singapore 270003  
[www.cwa.org.sg](http://www.cwa.org.sg)**

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# Foreword

Caregivers are often neglected. Little emphasis is put on the stress that caregivers face and experience in their roles. This absence of support coupled with a lack of awareness has resulted in caregiving being regarded as a heavy burden that is thrust upon the family caregivers.

As one can imagine, this creates negative connotations to an important social role when, in fact, caregivers play a vital part in our society. Only by supporting them can we give our seniors the grace and dignity to thrive and enjoy their golden years.

Caring for aged, loved ones can also bring families closer together as it can enhance relationships and foster love. More importantly, it enables seniors to age gracefully at home in the care of their close family members and friends. Caregiving is truly a labour of love, but it is also physically, mentally and emotionally exhausting, especially for the primary caregivers.

While every caregiving situation is different, caregivers often neglect self-care in the process of providing care and support to their loved ones. However, this is crucial as the journey of caregiving is a long and challenging one. As such, having the ability to self-care is one of the most important things that caregivers can do both for themselves and for those whom they care for.

To shed greater light on the noble role of caregiving, this Handbook was developed to provide a deeper perspective on the common issues faced by caregivers. Besides valuable information and resources, it covers various practical approaches to challenges that caregivers face during their journey of caregiving. This Handbook also explores different topics with guidance on what needs to be done and how it should be done. At the same time, this guide will address the emotional well-being of caregivers and their duties from physical aspects such as feeding and bathing their loved ones to Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA).

Every page of this Handbook contains useful information and tips that caregivers can benefit from. We sincerely hope that this Handbook will further help caregivers to better cope with some of their caregiving challenges.



**Dr Tan Hong Yee**  
President  
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7 November 2020

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The 'Caregiving for Seniors – A Practical Guide (2nd Edition)' is developed by the Caregiving Welfare Association (CWA) for family caregivers and community partners.

CWA would like to extend our sincere appreciation to our medical practitioners and healthcare professional partners in their respective fields of expertise who have provided their kind assistance in developing the Handbook. For all their contribution of time and efforts, our heartfelt thanks to:

**Ms Jeanette Chan**

Art Therapist  
ThruArts

**Mr Jaden Lim**

Principal Physiotherapist  
Rehab & Beyond Pte Ltd

**Ms Dorene Low**

Consultant Occupational Therapist  
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We would also like to acknowledge our Allied, Nursing and the Editorial teams at CWA for their invaluable and selfless contributions in the development of this Handbook.

Our thanks also go to all those who in one way or another have contributed to this Handbook.

# INTRODUCTION

Being a family caregiver to a senior is never easy. It requires dedication, time and sacrifices. More often than not, caregivers tend to find themselves feeling stressed out and, in the long run, experience what is commonly known as caregiver burnout. Caregiver burnout has become increasingly common, stemming from emotional stress, financial problems and physical strains.

To better prepare caregivers in their journey in caregiving, this 2nd edition of the Caregiver's Handbook by the Caregiving Welfare Association (CWA) will equip family caregivers with the knowledge in the different aspects of caregiving, so that they are better equipped to perform their duties more effectively. This Handbook will also touch on the importance of self-care and provide useful and practical knowhow to enable caregivers to address possible caregiving burnout.

In this 2nd edition, seniors and their family caregivers can look forward to some interesting activities where they can be engaged together. This Handbook will also delve into various topics such as nutrition, legal matters, psycho-emotional health and physical well-being. These are all important aspects of an effective caregiving strategy to make the role of caregiving easier.

CWA hopes that this Handbook will serve as a practical guide and tool for family caregivers to engage their seniors at home and for caregivers to practice self-care as well. Further, we encourage our community partners to share this Handbook with their clients and staff.

*This Handbook will equip family caregivers with the knowledge in the different aspects of caregiving, so that they are better equipped to perform their duties more effectively.*

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## DISCLAIMER

The information contained and/or referred to in this Handbook is intended to serve as a reference resource for general caregiving issues. Such information or any part thereof should not be taken as exhaustive as to any particular issue on caregiving, and should not be used in substitution of trained healthcare professional advice and/or consultation. If readers face any issue or problem that is health or medical related, readers should visit their trained healthcare professional and/or consultants immediately. Such information should also not be construed or regarded as formal legal and/or medical advice.

The publication of this Handbook is a public service of the Caregiving Welfare Association (CWA) to the caregiving community, and the CWA, its Board, staff members and those connected to the publication of this Handbook, shall not be liable for the currency, accuracy and/or the workability of the information contained and/or referred to in this Handbook.



# CHAPTER 1

## Caregiving

There are various components in caring for a senior. While physical care is the most common, there are other domains in caregiving for the senior that a family caregiver may also be involved in. The following section is a non-exhaustive list of the different aspects of caregiving.

### Different Aspects of Caregiving



#### Physical

- Assisting the senior in their Activities of Daily Living (ADLs), which are fundamental to one's basic functioning. The six basic ADLs are: mobility, washing or bathing, dressing, feeding, toileting, transferring.
- The physical well-being of a senior also consists of their medical and health needs. With age, the body undergoes several biological changes that may require medical attention. Managing the senior's health in both the medical and nutritional aspects are equally important.



#### Psycho-Emotional/Social

- Caring for the senior's psycho-emotional/social needs.
- When a senior suffers from chronic illness or disability, they face multiple losses (i.e. loss of competence in their day-to-day functioning, loss of control and their independence, etc.). This can affect their sense of self, which may cause drastic changes in their behaviour and personality (for example, becoming anxious, frustrated, or depressed).
- A senior's social networks may also become limited and caregivers may need to provide that social interaction to meet the senior's social needs.



#### Financial and Legal

- Encompasses supporting the senior financially and managing their financial matters.
- For a senior who may be mentally incapacitated, they may need to appoint someone to manage their financial and legal matters (i.e. Advanced Medical Directive, Advanced Care Plan, Lasting Power of Attorney).
- For some, you may act as a spokesperson for either the senior or the primary caregiver when it comes to decision-making about the senior's well-being.





## Food for Thought



### Physical

As one ages, family caregivers must be mindful of the home environment for the safety of their seniors. Ageing not only affects one's mobility but also their vision. A safe home for a senior includes having the toilets equipped with non-slip surfaces or tiles, grab bars for better stability, and proper lighting. Caregivers should also ensure that all passageways within the home, or bedrooms, are cleared of unnecessary items. This will help to prevent accidents such as trips and falls from happening. Most importantly, these considerations create an ideal and safe environment for our loved ones, especially seniors who have limited mobility.

In Chapter 4, caregivers can pick up some basic tips on what to take note of when it comes to providing for a senior's ADLs, particularly their personal hygiene. To illustrate, when rendering assistance to a senior, it is also essential to keep their feelings in mind. For example, seeking their opinions or even offering options on the type of clothing when dressing them is something that should not be overlooked. Asking them about their preferences, even on something as simple as a warm or cold glass of water, gives seniors the kind of respect that they deserve. Similarly, would we not prefer to be consulted first, rather than having others decide for us?

Apart from providing assistance in ADLs, the preparation and administration of medication is also usually part and parcel of providing care to a senior. A typical routine for a caregiver comprises of grocery shopping, preparation of meals, cleaning, providing personal care for their loved ones, and other tasks aimed at ensuring the best quality of life. More often than not, caregivers must also diligently administer medication to their loved ones. Besides patiently coaxing the seniors in taking their medication, the caregiver also has to ensure that the correct type and dosage of medication is administered. But with their busy schedules, there is the real issue where a caregiver could mistakenly under- or over-pack the correct quantity during the preparation (for example, preparing and packing) of medication. It is therefore advisable to find time to pack the senior's medication in advance so that such incidences can be avoided. A clear understanding of the benefits and side effects of the types of medication administered to their loved ones would also be helpful. Given the numerous responsibilities of a caregiver, it is of vital importance that caregivers take care of themselves so that such unintended, negative consequences can be avoided.

In Chapter 3, we share self-care tips that are crucial to the well-being of family caregivers. In essence, no matter how busy one gets, the importance of practicing self-care is imperative to one's mental health and wellness. With a good rest, caregivers will feel recharged, allowing them to provide better quality care to their loved ones. In the long run, this will be beneficial to both the caregiver and the care recipient. Self-care has to be deliberate and consistent to be effective.



### Food for Thought



### Psycho-Emotional/Social

It is often thought that seniors do not face isolation when they are living together with their families or even with their spouses. However, this belief may not hold true. Not all isolation is a result of family dynamics or circumstances. It could also be due to personality or behavioural changes as one ages. As such, it is advisable for family members or family caregivers to take note of such changes in their seniors. Very often, family members or loved ones are too busy with their daily schedules that quality time spent with their seniors is reduced or non-existent. As a result, many seniors end up feeling lonely or emotionally isolated.

In Chapters 6 to 8, we cover some simple exercises and cognitive activities that caregivers and their loved ones can engage in to spend meaningful quality time together.



## Food for Thought



### Financial and Legal

Coming from a larger family or having more than one family caregiver to share the caregiving duties may be a good thing. With extra help, the primary caregiver can get sufficient respite (“me” time/self-care), reducing or even eliminating caregiver’s burnout. However, “too many cooks spoil the broth”, and issues may arise when family caregivers carry out their plans without first consulting the others. This may result in arguments among family members and cause the recipient (i.e. senior) to feel that they are the cause of the unhappiness. It is, therefore, important to have open communication within the family, for example through a family conference, to update every member on the recipient’s situation and share ideas on how best to mitigate the situation. This is paramount especially when it comes to major decisions concerning the senior – for example, when a senior needs to undergo a major surgery, or making a decision on whether to pull the plug on a critically ill senior in a coma. In such cases, medical professionals would also be in a dilemma if there are opposing decisions coming from different family caregivers. As such, it is recommended that a spokesperson can be agreed upon among family members and be appointed as the main decision maker beforehand, and not only when a critical decision is needed during the end of life stage.

In Chapter 10, the Handbook will touch on the importance of Advance Care Plan (ACP) and Advance Medical Directive (AMD). It will address how family members can consider the ACP and AMD in the care plans when they involve their seniors in decisions concerning them.

## CHAPTER 2

### Effects of Caregiving

While caregiving can be a rewarding and fulfilling experience, having to care for a loved one may pose to be a major upheaval in our lives, both physically and emotionally. We will find ourselves making sacrifices which will require us to forgo some comforts of life. In addition, our routine and pace of life will be disrupted, and we may need to forge a new "normal" in our lives to assimilate these changes. The following are some effects that caregiving can bring about in our well-being as a family caregiver.

#### Physical Effects

Looking after a senior can be a physically demanding task, especially if we are doing it all alone. Caregivers may tend to overlook their own health needs by prioritising the senior's needs over theirs. Some common physical effects from caregiving include:



Some older caregivers, such as spousal caregivers, may also run a higher risk of their physical health being compromised, especially if they themselves have medical conditions (American Psychological Association, 2011). Our physical well-being also has a sequential effect on our mental well-being.

#### Social Effects

The demands of caregiving may also take a toll on our own social life. As we care for the senior, we may find it challenging to set aside time to meet with others like we did in the past. We may also choose to spend our free time at home recuperating from the physical and mental exhaustion instead of spending it with friends and family.

Apart from that, family caregivers may also find themselves in a situation where their jobs are affected. For some, they may decide to quit their jobs to fully commit to caregiving or they may switch to another job that allows them to allocate some time to their caregiving responsibilities. There will also be some others who may not have a choice but to continue balancing between working and caring for their seniors as they are also financially providing for the family.

For the sandwiched generation particularly, it may be even more challenging to juggle between caring for their own aged parents and their own family.

## Psychological Effects

Caregiving can have significant impacts on a caregiver's psychological well-being. Listed below are some common psychological consequences that are associated with caregiving.

### ► Negative Emotions

Along the course of our caregiving journey, certain negative emotions may surface. Feelings of anger, anxiety, guilt, and grief are some common emotions that may present themselves in different ways, and we may find it tough to regulate these natural responses.

- **Anger:** angry with the senior for their behaviour, angry at other family members for not contributing to the caregiving responsibilities, or even angry at ourselves.
- **Anxiety:** anxious about lacking control of the situation, anxious about the senior's condition.
- **Self-doubt:** questioning if we are doing our best for the senior.
- **Guilt:** guilty about the quality of care we are providing for the senior, guilty that we are seeking respite.
- **Grief:** grief over the loss of freedom, grief over the senior's impending passing.

Caregivers may also run the risk of being in a depressive mood or being depressed. Over certain periods of time, individuals may occasionally feel down and low-spirited. This is a normal part of life and one usually bounces back with different coping strategies. However, when the feelings of sadness and loss of interest to engage in everyday activities are prolonged for weeks and even months, it may be an indication of clinical depression. If a caregiver experiences at least three or more of the following symptoms for two weeks or more and observe that their normal daily functioning is being affected, they may be exhibiting signs of depression.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Feeling down or depressed all the time   | 7. Having negative thoughts or feeling bad about themselves             |
| 2. Loss of interest in things               | 8. Moving or speaking so slowly that other people have noticed a change |
| 3. Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much | 9. Thoughts that life is meaningless or that they are better off dead   |
| 4. Feeling tired or exhausted all the time  |   |
| 5. Difficulty concentrating on things       |   |
| 6. Poor appetite or over-eating             |   |

If left untreated, depression can negatively affect our personal, social, and work lives. Hence, it is important to consider obtaining professional help to tackle these prolonged and intense negative emotions that may impair our daily functioning.

### ► Caregivers' Stress and Burnout

Many family caregivers also report feeling stressed from their seemingly innumerable responsibilities, which is a normal and common reaction that emerges when placed in stressful situations. The stress can be attributed to a combination of various factors: physical, emotional, and financial. Coupled with the unpredictable and, sometimes, uncontrollable nature of caregiving, it is no wonder that the uncertainty will stress one out.

Some caregivers may be unaware of their ongoing stress and might question themselves on how the stress manifests in their undesired behaviours. Here are a few questions that caregivers may wish to ask themselves if they suspect that they are undergoing caregivers' stress.

<i>In the last two weeks, how often did you feel...</i>	<b>Never (0)</b>	<b>Rarely (1)</b>	<b>Sometimes (2)</b>	<b>Quite Frequently (3)</b>	<b>Nearly Always (4)</b>
<b><i>That you do not have sufficient time for yourself?</i></b>					
<b><i>Stressed trying to cope with caring for your loved ones and trying to settle other responsibilities (work, home)?</i></b>					
<b><i>Strained when you are around your loved ones?</i></b>					
<b><i>Uncertain about what to do for your loved ones?</i></b>					

Source: South West Community Development Council (CDC)

If the score exceeds eight points for these questions, there is a high likelihood that the caregiver is experiencing caregivers' stress. When left unaddressed, this chronic stress may ultimately perpetuate into caregivers' burnout. Burnout can result in caregivers feeling like they are no longer able to cope with the multiple demands of caregiving. Hence, it is advisable to first identify the sources of stressors before exploring ways to manage the stress.

While we cannot control the circumstances that some of us are made to be primary caregivers or to care for loved ones as a family, nor can we foresee how the future will unfold, we do have the capability to reduce the level of intensity of our anxiety, frustrations and stress. Perhaps, by rethinking or viewing the circumstances and situations that we are in, or reshaping the way in which we 'believe' the state that we are in, it will have an impact on how we can regain control of the situations we are facing in our lives.



### Food for Thought

There are times when we may not be in control of the situation that we are in. However, rather than just focusing and harping on what we cannot control, we can attempt to refocus our perspective towards the 'positive side' of the situation. For example, things that we are still in control of, or even better, managing well. Oftentimes, caregivers tend to overlook these aspects that are equally important as well.

## CASE STUDY

Ms Lim is a family caregiver to her grandmother, Mdm Tan, who is suffering from mild dementia that was diagnosed five years ago. As Ms Lim's parents have both passed on and she is an only child, she has to shoulder the responsibility of looking after her grandmother. Ever since Mdm Tan's diagnosis, it has significantly changed Ms Lim's lifestyle because she is unable to do the things she used to enjoy in the past. Apart from taking on the caregiving duties, she also juggles with having a part-time job to support Mdm Tan financially. To ensure that her grandmother is taken care of while she is at work, she has also arranged for Mdm Tan to be at a dementia day care centre.

As Mdm Tan's dementia has worsened recently, it has made caregiving more challenging than before. This has resulted in Ms Lim's frustrations and stress regarding her ability to care for her grandmother. At times, she finds herself blaming her grandmother for taking away her freedom. Yet, she also struggles with the guilt of feeling this way as she knows deep down that it is the only right thing to do as she is the only family member that her grandmother has.

### Questions:

#### 1. In this situation, what are some things that Ms Lim cannot control?

For example:

- (i) Grandmother's dementia.
- (ii) Having to work to provide for her grandmother and herself.
- (iii) Feeling guilty whenever she blames her grandmother for taking her freedom away.

#### 2. Despite her situation and her conflicting emotions, what are some things that are within her control?

For example:

- (i) Keeping her job and still being financially capable.

- (ii) Managing her internal thoughts about blaming her grandmother but instead looking at herself as the only family member who is able to provide the care for her loved one at home – filial piety.
- (iii) Making arrangements for her grandmother to be looked after at a dementia day care centre while she is at work.
- (iv) Arranging for her friends to visit her if she cannot hang out with them so that she can be with her grandmother and yet have her friends around.
- (v) Exercising at home whenever she is not able to head out to exercise.

**3. How can Ms Lim reframe her perspective on her situation such that she can look at the positive side of things?**

For example:

- (i) Helping her grandmother to the best of her abilities - being responsible/filial towards her loved one, though she is not able to hang out with her friends. However, she can make arrangements to meet with her friends as there are home personal care services that are available in the community, which she may engage, so that care can be provided for her grandmother while she enjoys a little respite.
- (ii) Appreciating the fact that she is still able to work and to provide for her family.

**Reflection:**

The situation we are in, may or may not be similar to Ms Lim's, but we should always reflect upon our own situations:

For example:

- Think about some positive outcomes/situations that we may not have thought of or talked about previously.
- Making an effort to practice self-care is equally important for our physical, mental and emotional health. Start by asking what can be done now to get that necessary respite.
- Treat ourselves with the same care and selflessness we provide our loved ones. It is neither weakness nor self-indulgence/selfishness when we are nice to ourselves. Think about the last time we practised being kind to ourselves.



# CHAPTER 3

## Tips on Self-Care

Often times, caregivers tend to downplay their needs and neglect their own physical, mental and emotional well-being. However, to provide good care and remain effective caregivers, they must look after their well-being as well. The following are some suggestions that caregivers may consider in their caregiving journey.

### **Be Prepared, Plan Ahead**

Obtaining relevant information can be useful in helping caregivers better understand the illness seniors may be suffering from and enable them to take an active part in helping the medical and allied teams better manage the seniors. Being informed and prepared also makes things seem more manageable and helps relieve some of the feelings of uncertainty caregivers may be experiencing, particularly if they are new to the caregiving role.

To combat feelings of anxiety around senior care, caregivers should also equip themselves with the relevant skills and knowledge through the various training courses available in the community. For example, the Agency of Integrated Care (AIC) has a list of caregiving courses on their website. The courses are covered under the Caregivers Training Grant (CTG), which is an annual subsidy amount given to caregivers for upskilling themselves. Additionally, there are other grants to support family caregivers financially that can be found on AIC's website as well.

### **How to Avoid Caregivers' Burnout**

#### ► *Delegation of Caregiving Responsibilities*

Caregiving can be especially challenging when caregivers have to provide care for both the seniors' physical and psycho-emotional well-being. As seniors age, their bodies may weaken, and they will need more support either from their loved ones or with the help of assistive devices to aid in their movement. Their cognitive abilities may also decline, with some seniors even suffering from certain mental conditions such as depression or dementia. This may make it more challenging for caregivers to look after their overall well-being and, as a result, caregiving will take a toll if there is little or no support.

To reduce the physical and mental strain of caregiving, it is ideal if caregiving can be shared among family members or with some form of help from non-family members, if possible. By doing so, the primary caregiver can enjoy some respite. It is also beneficial for caregivers to learn to entrust some responsibilities to others within the family or someone whom they trust like a close friend or neighbour. Not only can this arrangement relieve some of the caregiver's stress, it also helps seniors get accustomed to others so that caregivers can enjoy a brief respite with lesser worries.

### ► *Alternative Care Arrangements*

Apart from family members and domestic helpers, there are also alternative care arrangements available in the community that can help alleviate caregiving responsibilities. These can be categorised into three main categories: home-based services, centre-based services and residential-based services. Trained personnel providing these services can render further assistance to support the seniors while caregivers take a break.



#### **Care at Home**

- Meals on Wheels;
- Medical Escort and Transport;
- Home Medical;
- Home Nursing;
- Home Therapy;
- Home Personal Care;
- Hospice Home Care;
- Befriending Services



#### **Care at Centre**

- Day Care;
- Senior Activity Centre;
- Community Rehabilitation Centre;
- Centre-based Nursing



#### **Stay-in Care**

- Community Hospitals;
- Nursing Home;
- Inpatient Hospice;
- Shelter and Senior Group Home;
- Short-Term Stay-in Care

*Source: Agency of Integrated Care ([www.aic.sg/care-services](http://www.aic.sg/care-services))*

### ► *Professional Help*

Processing feelings and negative emotions can help caregivers perform at optimal levels in life. There is no need to feel weak for seeking professional help or support in carrying out caregiving responsibilities. Having professional help provides caregivers with a safe space to share their feelings without being judged while enabling them to attend to their emotional and mental well-being. Caregivers may consider the following options when seeking professional help:



### Support Groups

- Mutual exchange of information, knowledge and skills that will help caregivers through challenging situations.
- Emotional support from others who have been or are still in the same position.
- There are various support groups in the community that are listed on Health Hub.



### Counselling

- A safe, non-judgmental space for caregivers to share their feelings with a trained professional who can help them better manage their emotions and stress.
- Learn how to recognise stressors and healthy coping strategies to tackle these stressors.

Some caregivers may find it daunting and uncomfortable speaking to professionals about their problems. Alternatively, caregivers can also choose to confide in someone whom they trust and who can offer similar emotional support.

### Be Kind to Yourself

It is common and understandable that caregivers prioritise their seniors' needs over their own. However, neglecting their own needs can ultimately result in caregivers' burnout. Practising self-compassion is something that caregivers should begin incorporating into their lives to manage stress and avoid burnout. Being kind to yourself is neither a sign of weakness nor an indication of forsaking caregiving duties.

By extending the same compassion for their loved ones to themselves, caregivers will be more attuned to their own emotions, allowing them to better care for their own needs and, in turn, provide better quality care for their seniors. The practice of self-compassion can be accompanied by actions, in the form of self-care.

### Practice Self-care Activities

Many caregivers often overlook their own self-care. However, it is equally important to dedicate some time to themselves in order to remain mentally and physically strong. In doing so, caregivers can prevent exhaustion and burnout arising from their caregiving roles. There are various activities that caregivers can do to manage stress and exercise self-care – from simple, home-based activities (for example, exercising, enjoying their favourite food or taking short breaks) to activities offered in the community.

Most importantly, it is beneficial that caregivers find something they enjoy doing,

which also serves as a healthy coping strategy. Through intentional and consistent self-care, caregivers can attend to their needs and promote overall well-being. Below are some suggested therapeutic activities that caregivers can consider doing in their free time:

► *Mindfulness Practices*

Mindfulness is a natural quality in everyone. It is about paying attention to what is going on in your thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations and surrounding environment at the present moment without judgement. Increasingly, mindfulness practices are gaining recognition as an approach to manage stress and improve mental well-being. By practicing mindfulness, caregivers can learn to accept what is going on in the present moment, rather than retelling the past or imagining the future. This will also enable caregivers to gradually move away from the habitual ways of responding to various situations, to approaching problems in a calmer manner. While there are many ways to practice mindfulness, one technique that can be easily incorporated into a daily routine is mindful breathing.

### **Mindful Breathing Exercise**

1. Find a comfortable chair, sit up straight and comfortably with your back supported by the chair.
2. Place your palms on your thighs and relax your body.
3. Close your eyes and bring your awareness to your body sensation.
4. Begin to breathe in, preferably through the nose. Feel your belly and chest rising, your ribs expanding and your shoulders slightly moving up as you inhale.
5. As you exhale, notice your belly and chest falling, your ribs contracting and your shoulders moving back down.
6. As you breathe in and out, your mind will wander to other thoughts. Note those thoughts, gently bring your mind back to your breathing and continue to observe your breathing.
7. For starters, you can do this for 5-10 minutes. As you find yourself getting better, you may increase the duration of this practice.



Caregivers can practice this mindful breathing exercise before going to sleep. As having adequate and good quality sleep is important for overall well-being (i.e. better immune system, better mental health, etc.), this exercise may help restore some calmness and hopefully, aid caregivers in getting that sleep they deserve.

### ► Therapeutic Art Activities

Therapeutic art activities are more than just drawing, painting, colouring or cutting and pasting collages. There are many art activities that can enable caregivers to express their thoughts and feelings that are difficult to articulate in words. They can also be a platform for relaxation and reflection.

#### **Art Journaling**

There are a multitude of therapeutic art activities online and journaling is one such activity. Besides penning down their thoughts and feelings in words, caregivers can illustrate difficult inner emotions in the form of images and symbols.



#### Materials

- A blank book/diary/sketch book
- Any craft materials  
(for example, color pencils, paint, magazines, origami paper, stickers, etc.)

#### Steps

1. Before you begin, find a comfortable place with minimal distractions.
2. With the materials you have, you may start your creative journaling based on the thoughts and feelings that you wish to share at that moment.
3. Some things that you can reflect upon while creating your journal:
  - Your current thoughts and feelings
  - Your present situation
  - Your expectations and goals
  - Your worries and fears, etc.
4. After you have completed your entry for the day, you can choose to either share it with someone you trust or do some self-reflection.

# CHAPTER 4

## Personal Hygiene

As people age, their personal hygiene may decline due to having a weaker body. As such, seniors may have difficulty standing in the shower or getting out of bed to brush their teeth. However, even though some seniors may be bedridden most of the time, their personal hygiene should still be attended to as it is important to their physical and mental well-being.

This is why the role of a caregiver often includes assisting and helping seniors with their daily personal hygiene such as bathing, grooming and brushing their teeth. However, this requires patience, preparation and skill.

If the senior is not bedridden, they should be guided through the regular morning and evening routine for washing and dressing. Avoid allowing the senior to remain in bed if it is not medically required. Being as active as possible will boost the senior's self-esteem.

### Create a Relaxing Environment

Some seniors may feel embarrassed or resistant for someone to help in their hygiene process such as bathing and showering. As such, it is advisable to create a relaxing environment where they feel comfortable and calm. Below are some of the ways that can help to create a relaxing environment.

- Play some relaxing songs or the senior's favourite songs during the session.
- Try to communicate with the seniors during the session; this can be in the form of small talk.
- Ensure that the environment is properly illuminated.
- Organise the bathing items.
- Ensure that the environment has enough space.

### Protect the Senior's Modesty

Some seniors may feel that it is very degrading that they need help with showering or bathing. This is why it is very important to protect the senior's modesty during the process. For example, during showering or bathing, have a towel ready to cover the body parts that are not being cleaned. If possible, allow the seniors to wash or clean their own private areas during the process. These simple actions will also help boost the senior's self-esteem.

### Oral Hygiene

If the senior is unable to take care of their own oral hygiene, it is essential to assist them in the process. Keep the gums, teeth and mouth clean, healthy and fresh by following a twice-daily ritual.

### ▶ **What you will need**

- A bowl of cotton swabs
- 1 bowl of soda bicarbonate solution - ¼ teaspoon to 30ml water
- 1 bowl of antiseptic gargle - 1/4 solution + ¾ water
- A bowl for dentures
- 2 artery forceps
- Measuring cup
- Bib and disposable bag

### ▶ **What to do**

- Explain the procedure to the senior.
- Soak some cotton swabs with soda bicarbonate solution and some with antiseptic gargle.
- Prop the senior up or turn the senior to one side to reduce the risk of choking.
- Remove dentures if any.
- Clean mouth with the soda bicarbonate swab using the artery forceps. Follow with the antiseptic gargle swab on the lips, teeth, lining and roof of the mouth and tongue.
- Be careful not to cause the senior to retch by cleaning too far back in the mouth.
- Use each swab only once.
- Apply lip balm to lips to prevent dryness and cracking.
- Check for gum ulcers or dental cavities, seek treatment if necessary.
- Wash and dry all equipment.

### ▶ **Alternative equipment for home setting**

- Cotton swabs – Oral care cotton swabs, extra soft toothbrush or tongue brush. (use gently as gums are more delicate than teeth/tongue.)
- Sodium bicarbonate/antiseptic gargle – Gum care oral rinse, infant toothpaste.

### ▶ **Care of dentures**

- Brush dentures with nonabrasive toothpaste daily.
- Remove dentures and wash after each meal.
- Handle dentures carefully to avoid breaking.
- Check for cracks in the dentures.
- Advise the senior to replace dentures if they are loose or damaged.

### **Showering**

Caregivers should encourage seniors to shower on their own if they are able. However, be ready to assist with any difficulties and, above all, ensure that the senior does not put themselves at risk of a fall or injury.

### ▶ **What you will need**

- Flannel
- Long-handled brush
- Long-handled sponge
- Toiletries

### ▶ **What to do**

- For seniors with mobility issues, have them sit in a standard shower chair, commode or even the toilet bowl while showering as appropriate for their condition.
- Place toiletries, wash aids, towel and clothing within reach.
- Use a non-slip mat to prevent accidental slipping and falls.
- Encourage the senior to do everything as much as possible without your help.
- Ensure the senior focuses on cleaning the neck, armpits, feet, groin and genitalia, behind the ears and in any skin folds.

Seniors may need assistance with scrubbing the back and washing the feet as these are difficult areas for some to reach.

## **Bed Bathing**

Bed bathing is advisable for seniors who are not mobile enough to shower in the bathroom or for bedridden seniors.

### ▶ **What you will need**

- Basin of water
- A basin/pail for soiled linen
- Soap (preferably with moisturiser)
- Two face towels
- Bath towel
- Pyjamas
- Moist cotton wool swabs

### ▶ **What to do**

- Cover the senior with a clean sheet or towel.
- Undress the senior, taking care to expose the body as little as possible.
- Place the bath towel under the area to be washed and proceed to wash and dry in the following sequence – face, ears, neck, arms, chest, abdomen, legs and back of legs and arms. Change the basin of water when necessary.
- Observe for skin redness and broken skin, especially over bony areas.
- Apply moisturising cream/lotion to dry skin.
- Turn the senior to the side to wash and dry the back and buttocks.
- Wash and dry the groin and genitalia area with soap and water, paying attention to skin folds.
- Apply barrier cream or powder if the senior is incontinent or has fragile skin.
- Dress the senior and position them comfortably in bed.



## Hair Washing

Hair washing can be done twice a week or more depending on the senior's preference.

### ► What you will need

- A basin of water
- An empty basin
- Shampoo/no rinse shampoo
- Small hand towel
- Two bath towels
- Comb/brush
- Plastic sheet/medical disposable sheet

### ► What to do

- Explain the procedure to the senior.
- Request assistance to support or turn the senior if necessary and to support the senior's head during the procedure.
- Remove the pillows and position the senior near the top of the bed.
- Place a towel under the senior's head, and a plastic sheet/medical disposable sheet over the towel to protect the bed from getting wet.
- Place the empty basin or shampoo basin/tray/bowl\* under the senior's head.
- Wet the hair and shampoo thoroughly, massaging the scalp. Ensure that suds do not get into the senior's eyes. Rinse the hair thoroughly and squeeze excess water thoroughly from the hair.
- Remove the basin of soiled water.
- Place the bath towel under the nape of the neck and dry the hair with the towel.
- Comb and dry the hair and style if necessary.

*\*shampoo tray/basin/bowl – C- or otherwise shaped basin that allows the senior to place their head inside with minimum discomfort to the neck and head.*

**Note:** For dry, no-rinse shampoo, shampoo caps or other hair care products, follow the appropriate manufacturer's instructions.

## Changing of Bedsheets

Change the bed sheets if soiled and at least once a week otherwise. This is easily done when the senior is out of bed. However, if the senior is bedridden, changing the bed sheets should be done during the bed bathing.

### ► What to do

- Raise bed to your waist height. (for hospital beds)
- Turn the senior onto one side and roll the bed sheet away from you and under the senior.
- Remove the bed sheet and wipe/clean the visible bed.
- Put on a new bed sheet in the same way, rolling the senior away from you. Leave enough room to tuck the sheet under the mattress on every side.

- Go around to the other side of the bed and pull the bed sheet tight to ensure no wrinkles before tucking the last side under.



Turn the senior onto one side and roll the bed sheet away from you and under the senior.



Remove the bed sheet and wipe/clean the visible bed.



Put on a new bed sheet in the same way, rolling the senior away from you. Leave enough room to tuck the sheet under the mattress on every side.



Go around to the other side of the bed and pull the bed sheet tight to ensure no wrinkles before tucking the last side under.

# CHAPTER 5

## Nutrition

### Healthy Ageing

Nutrition plays a big part in the physical health and well-being of seniors.

Combined with physical activity, adequate and balanced nutrition helps to maintain a healthy weight, reduces risk of chronic diseases and promotes overall health.

As we age, we may become less active, resulting in us losing muscle, which may cause our metabolism to slow down and reduce our calorie needs. However, despite a lower metabolism and calorie needs, adequate and proper nutrition is still essential for seniors to stay healthy and prevent malnutrition<sup>1</sup>. Common age-related changes such as slower digestion, dampened senses of taste, as well as dental issues may further contribute to reduced oral intake<sup>1</sup>. Further, socioeconomic factors such as financial constraints and accessibility to food can lead to reduced food security among our seniors.

With this in mind, we explore how our seniors can navigate through the various challenges to achieve good nutrition, good health and a good quality of life.

### Nutrition for Seniors<sup>2</sup>

Designed by the Health Promotion Board, 'My Healthy Plate' shows the right amounts one should eat for each meal.

- Fill half your plate with fruit and vegetables
- Fill a quarter with whole-grains
- Fill a quarter with meat and others
- Use healthier oils
- Choose water
- Be active

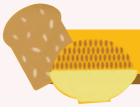


<sup>1</sup> HealthHub, Live Healthy: Your Golden Years: Nutrition for the Elderly.

<sup>2</sup> HealthHub, Programmes: My Healthy Plate.

Food Groups	Recommended number of servings per day							
	6 months (181 days) -12 months	1-2 years	3-6 years	7-12 years	13-18 years	19-50 years	51 years and above	Pregnant and lactating women
Brown Rice & Wholemeal Bread	1-2	2-3	3-4	5-6	6-7	5-7	4-6	6-7
Fruit	½	½-1	1	2	2	2	2	2
Vegetables	½	½	1	2	2	2	2	3
Meat & Others <i>of which</i> Dairy foods or calcium-rich foods	2 1½	2 1½	2 1	3 1	3 1	3 ½	3 1	3½ 1

Example of one serving size for various food groups:



### Brown rice and wholegrain

1. 2 slices of bread (60g)
2. ½ bowl of rice (100g)
3. ½ bowl of noodles, spaghetti or bee hoon (100g)
4. 4 plain biscuits (40g)
5. 1 large potato (180g)
6. 1 thosai (60g)
7. 2 small chapatis (60g)



### Meat and others

1. 1 palm-sized fish, lean meat or skinless poultry (90g)
2. 2 small blocks of soft beancurd (170g)
3. ¾ cup of cooked pulses for example, lentils, peas, beans (120g)
4. 1 glass of milk (250g)



### Fruits and vegetables

1. ¾ mug of cooked leafy vegetables (100g)
2. ¾ mug of cooked non-leafy vegetables (100g)
3. ¼ round plate of cooked vegetables
4. 1 small apple, orange, pear or mango (130g)
5. 1 medium banana

## How many servings of each food group is recommended daily for seniors?

Food Groups	Recommended servings per day
Brown rice and wholemeal bread	4 – 6 servings
Fruits	2 servings
Vegetables	2 servings
Meats and others	2 servings
Dairy or calcium-rich foods	1 serving

## Example of a 1-day meal plan for a senior:

<b>Breakfast</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shredded chicken porridge – 1 bowl (500g)</li> <li>• Tea (less sweet) – 1 cup (250ml)</li> </ul>
<b>Snack</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bread – 1 slice (30g)</li> <li>• Low-fat milk / High-calcium soya milk – 1 glass (250ml)</li> </ul>
<b>Lunch</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brown rice – 1 bowl (200g) or thick porridge – 1 bowl (400g)</li> <li>• Soft beancurd – 2 small blocks (170g)</li> <li>• Stir-fried mixed vegetables – 1 portion (100g)</li> <li>• Barley water (less sweet) – 1 glass (250ml)</li> </ul>
<b>Snack</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low-fat yoghurt – 1 carton (100g)</li> <li>• Papaya – 1 slice (130g)</li> <li>• Plain water – 1 glass (250ml)</li> </ul>
<b>Dinner</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fish slice beehoon soup with vegetables – 1 bowl (600g)</li> <li>• Plain water – 1 glass (250ml)</li> </ul>
<b>Supper</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watermelon – 1 slice (130g)</li> </ul>

Maintaining a healthy balanced diet that includes a variety of different foods is important in ensuring that we consume all the essential nutrients our body needs to stay healthy. 'My Healthy Plate' serves as a guide towards creating balanced and healthy meals.

Having adequate food portions, protein intake, hydration and being active help build muscle, strength and maintain a good immune system. If you find it difficult to manage three large meals, consider switching to 5–6 smaller meals a day. If you do not feel hungry, set reminders to eat.

Choosing whole grains and having adequate fruits and vegetables will help to prevent or manage the “3 Highs” (i.e. high blood sugar, high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol). Meanwhile, choosing water as the main source of fluids and using healthier oils will help in managing sugar levels and blood cholesterol levels.

### Eating well on a budget

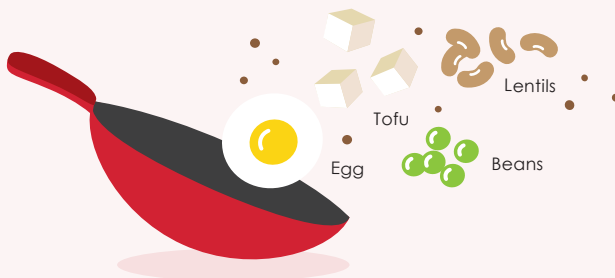
A nutritious meal is commonly misinterpreted as being expensive and costly. Eating well can be affordable and inexpensive if you know what to eat. Understanding the right foods to buy for cooking at home or eating out can in fact save a lot of money while ensuring adequate nutrition intake.

► *Examples of food combinations for a simple meal at home:*



► *Tips to eat out without spending too much:*

1. Choose eggs or plant protein occasionally.



## 2. Make use of food court cards.

### Kopitiam

- \$2 cost price.
- 10% discount for food.

### NTUC Union Card

- 5 to 15% discount for NTUC Value Meals at Foodfare food courts.
- Those with "Live" logo behind their card can get a 10% discount on Tuesdays with their Senior Citizen Card.



### ► Tips to eating at home on a budget

- Buy from wet markets.
- Buy house brands for example, FairPrice, Giant.
- Replace meat with other protein ingredients with longer shelf lives for example, sardines, soya corn fresh eggs, baked beans.
- Buy canned or frozen food.

## Vegetarian Diet<sup>3,4</sup>

There are four common types of vegetarian diets:

1. Lacto-vegetarian – Only plant-based and dairy products. Does not take animal products (i.e. meat, fish, poultry) and eggs.
2. Ovo-vegetarian – Only plant-based products and eggs. Does not take other animal products (i.e. meat, fish, poultry) and dairy products.
3. Lacto-ovo vegetarian – Only plant-based products, dairy products and eggs. Does not take animal products (i.e. meat, fish, poultry).
4. Vegan – Only plant-based products and is the most restrictive form of a vegetarian diet. Does not take animal products (i.e. meat, fish, poultry), dairy products and eggs.

Individuals on a vegetarian diet may want to take note as being a vegetarian may come with potential health risks. Some essential nutrients (i.e. protein, iron, calcium, zinc, vitamin B12 and vitamin D) can be compromised if not planned well. As such, it is important to continue to maintain a healthy balanced diet even as a vegetarian.

## Protein

Protein helps to build and repair tissues in the body. It is also vital for our immune system, and in fighting viral and bacterial infections. Inadequate protein intake may lead to weakness, fatigue, and poor immunity. Weak muscles could also result in an increased risk of falls.

<sup>3</sup> Better Health Channel, Victoria State Government: Vegetarian and vegan eating.

<sup>4</sup> Eat Right, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: Food Sources of 5 Important Nutrients for Vegetarians.

Examples of protein sources:

- Soy products (for example, tofu, tempeh, soy beverages)
- Legumes (for example, beans, peas and lentils)
- Nuts and seeds
- Quinoa and amaranth (to substitute rice and wheat flour)

## Iron

Iron is an important dietary mineral that helps to transport oxygen in the blood and provide energy. Iron deficiency can occur if we do not consume enough iron in our diet. Common symptoms of iron deficiency include tiredness, pallor, dizziness and fatigue.

Examples of iron sources:

- Cereal products (for example, breakfast cereals and bread)
- Whole grains
- Green leafy vegetables
- Dried fruits

## Calcium

Calcium is a key mineral for strong bones and teeth, as well as the health and functioning of nerves and muscle tissues. Insufficient calcium leads to weak bones, increasing the risk of bone fractures.

Examples of calcium sources:

- Dairy products
- Plant-based milk drinks fortified with calcium
- Cereals and fruit juices fortified with calcium
- Certain nuts (for example, almonds and Brazil nuts)

## Zinc

Zinc is an important mineral that is necessary for our immune system. Lack of zinc may cause loss of appetite and impaired immune function, making one more susceptible to disease and illness.

Examples of zinc sources:

- Nuts
- Miso
- Whole-grain foods
- Legumes

<sup>7</sup> HealthHub, Live Healthy: Vegetarian Diet.

<sup>9</sup> HealthHub, Live Healthy: Are Vegetarian Diets Also Balanced Diets?

<sup>8</sup> HealthHub, Live Healthy: Daily Calcium Intake – For Greater Bone Strength.



## Vitamin B12

Vitamin B12 is a vital nutrient that helps our body to produce red blood cells while keeping our nervous system healthy. Vitamin B12 deficiency can lead to a wide range of health concerns including tiredness, lack of energy, muscle weakness and memory loss.

Examples of vitamin B12 sources:

- Dairy products
- Eggs
- Certain soy beverages
- Certain vegetarian sausages and burgers

### Risks of Vitamin B12 deficiency:

People following a vegan diet are at a higher risk of developing vitamin B12 deficiency as this vitamin is usually found in animal products.

As such, seniors who choose a vegan diet have to be cautious of the high risk of vitamin B12 deficiency. This is especially so as vitamin B12 absorption becomes less efficient as we age. It is recommended that seniors following a vegan diet take vitamin B12 supplements to avoid deficiency – including anaemia.

## Vitamin D

Vitamin D is another nutrient that is important for building strong bones and muscles as it helps the body to absorb calcium. The best source of vitamin D is from direct sunlight exposure as the body creates vitamin D from direct sunlight on the skin.

Examples of vitamin D sources:

- Eggs
- Certain margarines
- Certain cereals
- Certain dairy and plant-based milk drinks

It is advisable to check with your doctor/dietitian before starting on any vitamin/mineral supplements.

## Summary

A well-planned vegetarian meal should provide all the essential vitamins and minerals that are necessary for a healthy life. It is advisable to practice 'My Healthy Plate' for adequate servings from each food group while including the food sources shared above to maintain sufficient nutrition intake and avoid nutritional deficiencies.

## Nutrition for Dementia

Dementia is an umbrella term that describes a wide range of symptoms including memory loss and mental decline.

Seniors with dementia often experience an ongoing challenge with adequate eating and drinking as the disease progresses. There are two spectrums of nutritional concerns for those suffering from dementia, namely undereating and overeating. Overeating increases the risk of the "3-Highs" whereas undereating increases the risk of malnutrition and its consequent health implications, such as weakness, frailty, decreased immunity, frequent hospitalisation and prolonged hospitalisation. As such, it is vital to couple 'My Healthy Plate' with the useful tips and strategies provided here to ensure adequate nutrition.

To tackle the issue of overeating and undereating, consider the below tips and strategies:

Overeating	Undereating
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Encourage small frequent meals – split the meals to multiple times throughout the day, every 2–3 hourly.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Keep the dining area simple and free of distractions (for example, use simple menus, stay away from handphones or the television, create a quiet and conducive eating environment).</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Choose healthy snacks such as nuts, wholemeal crackers or steamed chickpeas instead of oily snacks. (For more information on the types of healthy snacks, please visit Health Hub's 'Make Snacking Smart A Healthy Eating Habit' page.)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Encourage frequent small meals. Aim for 3 small meals and 2–3 snacks or milky drinks daily. Large portions may put some off their food. Avoid skipping meals.</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Try to introduce engaging activities such as singing, reading, drawing, exercising and sewing, to distract them from food.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Encourage food at times when the senior has more appetite. Some eat better as the day goes on while others eat better in the morning.</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Set fixed mealtimes and continue to re-orientate the senior to mealtimes.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Look out for signs of eating difficulties (chewing/swallowing), for example, choking on food, spitting out food, holding food in the mouth, longer feeding time. Consider cutting the food into smaller pieces to facilitate eating. Inform your doctor/speech therapist if you pick up signs of eating difficulties to further assist on specific strategies to address concerns.</li> </ol>

## Overall Summary

- Nutrition is important to the well-being of seniors and can help them live healthy lifestyles based on their food intake.
- Meal planning is important to ensure seniors receive the necessary nutrients during the ageing process to prevent certain diseases.
- Different nutrients have different benefits to seniors and deficiencies in any of the nutrients could have adverse effects.
- For seniors who are vegetarians, it is important to ensure that they still receive a healthy intake of the essential nutrients.

<sup>5</sup> Nutrition and Dementia. A practical guide when caring for a person with dementia. Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute.

<sup>6</sup> Make Snacking Smart A Healthy Eating Habit.

# CHAPTER 6

## Exercises for Caregivers

With all the responsibilities of caregiving, caregivers tend to neglect their own health and well-being. That said, exercising is a great way for caregivers to increase their energy levels, maintain a positive mood and stay healthy during the caregiving journey.

Here are some benefits from exercising:

Physical health benefits	Cognitive health benefits
1. Aids in the prevention of health issues for all ages (especially above 65)	1. Improves brain function and memory
2. Strengthens muscles and bones, reducing the chances of osteoporosis, and slows down the loss of muscular abilities	2. Helps to prevent vascular dementia (vascular dementia is a common type of dementia, which is an illness that affects the brain)
3. Helps keep joints, tendons, and ligaments flexible	3. Better concentration
4. Strengthens the heart and lungs	

### Different Types of Exercises

**Muscular Strengthening, Stretching and Aerobic Training** improve muscular strength, flexibility and stamina respectively. These different types of exercises can even help relieve some stress and aid in daily caregiving duties.

**a) Muscular Strength** is the ability to move and carry objects. This can be measured by the amount of force exerted or weight lifted over a short time.

Exercises that increase muscular strength include push-ups, planks and lifting weights in the gym. The increase in muscular strength will in turn help caregivers in other areas of their everyday life such as carrying heavier grocery bags and climbing stairs.

## Muscular Strengthening Exercises



### Half Squats

#### ▶ **Step 1: Starting Position**

Stand straight with feet and knees shoulder-width apart.

#### ▶ **Step 2: Ending Position**

Bend your knees and imagine yourself sitting on a chair behind you. Keep your knees steady as you lower yourself.

You may hold your hands out in front to balance yourself.

Repeat 5 to 8 times.

Continue with 3 sets of the same exercise and remember to rest for 1 minute in between sets.

You can increase the intensity of this exercise by:

- ✓ Carrying heavier weights
- ✓ Increasing the number of sets



### Pelvic Bridging

#### ▶ **Step 1: Starting Position**

Lie down with your knees bent and feet close to your buttocks. Keep your knees and ankles shoulder-width apart.

#### ▶ **Step 2: Ending Position**

Keep your knees steady as you lift your buttocks off the floor.

Repeat 5 to 8 times.

Continue with 3 sets of the same exercise and remember to rest for 1 minute in between sets.

You can increase the intensity of this exercise by:

- ✓ Using one leg at a time
- ✓ Increasing the number of sets



**b) Flexibility** refers to our muscles' ability and joints to engage in a range of movements freely without experiencing any difficulty, discomfort or pain. Good flexibility helps increase mobility and muscle coordination, reduce muscle pain, and prevent injuries. Stretching is one simple way to improve flexibility. It can help to promote greater range of motion, lower the risk of injuries and help to strengthen muscles.

### Lower Limb Stretching Exercises



#### Quadriceps Stretch

##### ► **Step 1: Starting Position**

Stand straight with feet slightly apart and shift weight to the right.

##### ► **Step 2: Holding Position**

Lift your left ankle towards your hip with your left hand and hold the position for 30 seconds. You should feel the stretch in the front of your thigh.

Repeat the exercise with the right ankle and hold the position for 30 seconds.



#### Front Hip (Iliopsoas) Stretch

##### ► **Step 1: Starting Position**

Stand straight with feet slightly apart and step forward onto your right foot.

##### ► **Step 2: Holding Position**

Place your hands on your right thigh and shift your hips forward, lifting the left heel while keeping the left knee straight.

Hold the position for 30 seconds. You should feel the stretch in the front of your left upper thigh.

Repeat the exercise with the other leg and hold the position for 30 seconds.



### Hamstring Stretch

#### ► Step 1: Starting Position

Lie on your back and use both hands to hold onto the back of your right thigh.

#### ► Step 2: Finishing Position

Straighten your knee and feel the stretch on the back of your right thigh.

Hold the position for 10 seconds.

Repeat the exercise with the other leg and hold the position for 10 seconds.



## Upper Limb Stretching Exercises



### Shoulder Stretch

#### ► Step 1: Starting Position

Stand straight with feet slightly apart.

#### ► Step 2: Holding Position

Bring your right arm to the left shoulder and hold it straight across your chest. Hold the position for 20 seconds. Repeat the exercise on the other side.



### Chest Stretch

#### ► **Step 1: Starting Position**

Stand with your right elbow pressed against the wall or doorway.

#### ► **Step 2: Holding Position**

Without moving your right arm, slowly turn your torso to the left until you feel a stretch in your right shoulder and chest. Hold this position for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat the exercise on the other side.

**c) Stamina or Aerobic Fitness** is the ability to sustain prolonged physical effort.

Endurance activities, often referred to as aerobic exercises, increase breathing and heart rates. These activities help keep us healthy and improve fitness so we can perform the tasks we need to do every day. As our body adapts to regular aerobic exercise, we will experience better health and a stronger immune system. Other benefits of aerobic exercises include:

- Lower blood pressure
- Better muscle function and endurance
- Enhanced sleep quality
- Improved brain functions
- Better weight management
- Elevated mood

#### **Examples of Aerobic Exercises:**

- Brisk walking
- Running or jogging
- Cycling (Stationary/Outdoors)
- Swimming
- Stair climbing
- Rope skipping



## Brisk Walking

A brisk walk is probably one of the easiest and most effective aerobic exercise. All you need is just the proper sports attire and a pair of running shoes and you are good to go.

### ► Tips on Brisk Walking

- Walk a short distance for a start and gradually increase the distance over time.
- Warm up and cool down with a slow walk.
- Ensure that you have access to water as you exercise so that you can hydrate yourself often.
- Take light, easy steps and ensure that your heel touches the ground before your toes.
- If possible, walk on softer ground like grass (rather than concrete) to help absorb the impact.
- Set realistic goals and choose walks that suit your age and fitness level.

### ► Maintaining Good Posture

- Hold your head in an upright position.
- Look straight ahead.
- Keep your chin parallel to the ground.
- Relax your shoulders and move naturally.
- Maintain a straight posture.
- Swing your arms freely as you walk.
- Tighten your stomach muscles gently as you walk.

## How Much Exercise is Needed?

*"To achieve substantial health benefits, the minimum physical activity session should be at least 10 minutes. The 10-minute sessions can be accumulated throughout the week to achieve 150 minutes of \*moderate intensity, or 75 minutes of \*\*vigorous intensity physical activity a week."*

*(Source: Health Promotion Board)*

#### Legend:

\* Moderate Intensity = noticeable increase in your heart rate and breathing rate. You may sweat, but you are still able to engage in conversation.

\*\* Vigorous Intensity = physical activity done with a large amount of effort, resulting in a substantially higher heart rate and rapid breathing. Your exertion would be considered hard to extremely hard, making it difficult to speak in full sentences.

## Rest and Recovery

It is also very important to plan for adequate rest and recovery. Mental fatigue, feelings of burnout, and extreme muscle soreness that lasts for more than three or four days are all signs that one needs to postpone moderate and vigorous exercises and let their muscles and joints rest.

## Safety Factors

Before embarking on any exercises, do consult a healthcare professional(s) so that they can do the necessary checks and offer useful advice and tips regarding safety when exercising. Always exercise in a safe environment. If you experience any discomfort during exercising, listen to your body and seek professional medical advice.

Stop exercising if these symptoms are observed during/after exercise:

- Shortness of breath
- Unable to communicate while resting
- Chest discomfort
- Paleness
- Irregular heartbeat

For more information on other physical exercises that are more senior-friendly, visit [www.healthhub.sg/programmes/71/healthy-ageing-exercise](http://www.healthhub.sg/programmes/71/healthy-ageing-exercise) or [www.healthhub.sg](http://www.healthhub.sg) to find out more.

# CHAPTER 7

## Exercises for People with Limited Mobility

Over time as we age, our joints and muscles tend to stiffen and tighten if not well maintained. Exercise will help to strengthen muscles, bones and joints and, in turn, improve mobility, coordination and range of motion. As such, it is important that caregivers know how to help those with limited mobility to exercise sufficiently.

### Examples of Typical Basic Exercises for Individuals with Limited Mobility

The following exercises are suitable for individuals with limited mobility. Do ensure that the mattress that the individual will be lying on is firm with sufficient support.

*Disclaimer: Always exercise your own judgement. This handbook is not intended to substitute the medical and professional advice you or your care recipient receives, and information shared is non-exhaustive.*



#### Hip and Knee Flexion

##### ▶ **Step 1:**

Cradle the leg by placing one hand under the bent knee.

##### ▶ **Step 2:**

With the other hand, grasp the heel for stabilisation.

##### ▶ **Step 3:**

Lift the knee and bend it towards the chest, with the kneecap pointed towards the ceiling. Do not allow the hip to twist during this movement. The foot should stay in a straight line with the hip and not swing in or out.

##### ▶ **Step 4:**

The leg is then lowered to the starting position.

(Source: [https://alsworldwide.org/assets/misc/RANGE\\_OF\\_MOTION\\_EXERCISES\\_WITH\\_PHOTOS\\_copy.pdf](https://alsworldwide.org/assets/misc/RANGE_OF_MOTION_EXERCISES_WITH_PHOTOS_copy.pdf))



### Lumbar Rotation

#### ► **Step 1:**

Bend both knees up and keep them together.

#### ► **Step 2:**

Lower them to one side as far as they can comfortably go. Repeat on the other side.



### Passive Hamstring Stretch

#### ► **Step 1:**

Support the knee and heel.

#### ► **Step 2:**

Slowly raise the leg up while keeping the knee straight.

#### ► **Step 3:**

Return to the starting position.



### Shoulder Flexion/Extension

#### ► **Step 1:**

Hold the wrist with one hand.

#### ► **Step 2:**

With the other hand, grasp the elbow joint to stabilise it.

#### ► **Step 3:**

Turn the palm inward, facing the body, and keep the elbow relatively straight.

#### ► **Step 4:**

Move the arm from the side of the body over the head.

The following exercises are suitable for individuals with limited mobility. Do ensure that the individual is seated on a proper chair with good support and is able to place his/her feet flat on the ground.



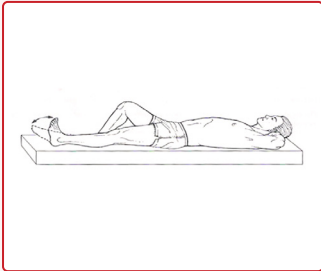
#### Leg Kicking

##### ▶ **Step 1:**

Sit on a chair.

##### ▶ **Step 2:**

Straighten your knee as far as you can. Hold for 5 seconds and then bring it down. Repeat with the other leg.



#### Ankle Pumping

##### ▶ **Step 1:**

Lie flat on your back with your knee straight.

##### ▶ **Step 2:**

Bend ankle up and down as far as possible in both directions. Do this exercise on both sides.



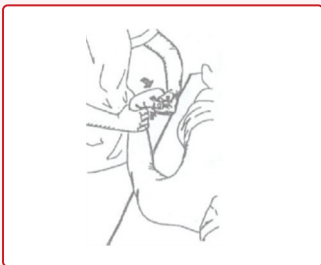
#### Wrist and Finger Flexion/Extension

##### ▶ **Step 1:**

Bend the wrist backward, while straightening the fingers out.

##### ▶ **Step 2:**

Then bend the wrist in the opposite direction while curling the fingers into a fist. Repeat steps 1 and 2 for the other hand.



*\*This simple exercise can be done a couple of times on each hand. It is recommended to do 20 repetitions of 3–5 sets. In the case of limited mobility, this exercise will help prevent stiffness in your joints and exercise the muscles in the fingers.*

# CHAPTER 8

## Cognitive Activities for Seniors

As we age, we might have trouble remembering things such as past events. Cognitive skills that affect our daily lives such as reading, speaking, learning and recalling past events might be a challenge for the seniors. This can be due to several factors such as dementia, which is a common illness among the seniors.

While there are different types of dementia, Alzheimer's disease is the most common among seniors. Often, we hear that seniors exhibit forgetfulness, which is usually deemed as a tell-tale sign of Alzheimer's. While forgetfulness is common, it does not necessarily indicate that the senior is showing onset of dementia as forgetfulness can also be attributed to the typical ageing process. There are also other factors that can lead to forgetfulness such as mood, anxiety and nutritional factors. Alzheimer's disease is characterised by the following presenting symptoms:

- Memory loss that affects one's day-to-day functioning
- Difficulty in performing familiar tasks
- Problems with language
- Disorientation of time and place
- Poor or decreased judgement
- Problems with abstract thinking
- Misplacing things
- Changes in mood or behaviour
- Changes in personality
- Loss of initiative

As part of the preventive and remedial work towards tackling Alzheimer's, seniors are constantly encouraged to participate in cognitive activities.

Cognitive activities are as important as physical exercise. These activities help to stimulate the brain just as physical exercise helps to strengthen our bodies. Not only can cognitive activities help seniors to improve their memory, they can also improve other cognitive functions such as attention, processing speed, motor planning skills, creativity and problem-solving skills.

### Factors to consider when planning for an activity

When planning for an activity with the senior, caregivers must first understand that different individuals may react differently to the same activity. This can be due to several factors such as the individual's preference, interest and cognitive abilities. When planning an activity session, it is recommended to consider the following areas:

- Conduciveness of the environment (background noise, lighting, space)
- Social history and the individual's area of interest (culture, language, hobbies, previous job occupation)
- Mood and demeanour of the individual
- Cognitive abilities and physical function of the individual

- Timing of activity (try to plan activities that require more concentration when seniors are more alert in the earlier part of the day)

If the senior shows great resistance towards an activity, do not force them and consider switching to a new activity. Remember to always find an activity that is meaningful and purposeful to the individual. Most importantly, the senior should enjoy the activity at that point of time.

### Types of cognitive activities

Different types of activities offer different benefits. Here are some of the activities caregivers can conduct to engage seniors at home with minimal resources:

- Art and Craft (Colouring/Painting/Drawing/Folding origami)
- Reminiscence Activities
- Activities of Daily Living (Feeding/Dressing/Showering/Toileting/Functional mobility)
- Reading news articles or a book
- Hobbies and leisure activities (Singing/Cooking/Baking/Gardening)
- Playing board/card games/puzzles
- Physical exercise (Walking/Arm and leg exercise/Dancing)

### Reminiscence activities

Reminiscence is the act of recollection and remembering of the past. A reminiscence activity can be a simple conversation with the senior about their past occupation and the places or locations that they used to visit.

Reminiscence activities can help seniors to improve their cognitive ability by simulating their memories. It can also help caregivers to better understand the seniors as individuals.

Here are some reminiscence activities to engage the senior at home:

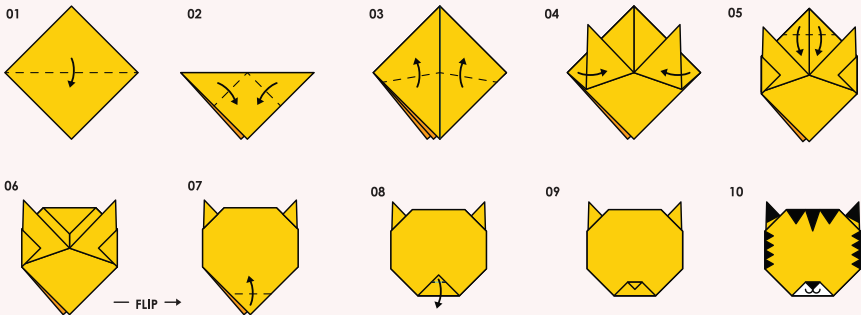
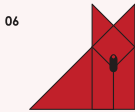
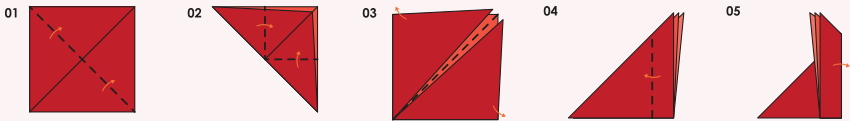
- Listening and singing to the senior's favourite songs
- Drawing/colouring of familiar objects and places
- Looking through old pictures and photographs
- Watching shows that remind the senior about the past
- Cooking dishes that they used to cook
- Playing games that they used to play during their childhood, for example: aeroplane chess, spinning top, five stones and marbles.

**Note:** *It is useful to encourage sharing and conversations during these activities by gently probing or asking more about their experiences and showing an active interest in what the senior has to say. Also, try selecting songs, places or photographs that invoke positive or pleasant emotions for them.*

## Origami Activity

Origami folding is an activity that both seniors and their caregivers can participate in. Origami is mentally stimulating as it trains fine motor skills and mental concentration. This activity can also help improve cognitive skills in the process of learning how to fold the origami.

### Origami Instructions



## Colouring

Colouring is a form of art therapy that can be used not only to engage seniors but also caregivers. It is a simple activity that can be conducted at home and with minimal resources (paper and colouring materials). Studies have shown that art therapy helps to improve the cognitive and mental well-being of the individual while also allowing seniors to express their creative side.

Colouring can:

- Create a positive mood
- Give a feeling of control
- Improve cognitive well-being (cognitive function)



- Instil confidence
- Reduce stress
- Improve motor skills (hand-eye coordination)

### **Tips to improve participation of seniors**

Some seniors may be resistant to the idea of colouring as they may perceive that colouring is a 'childish' activity. There are several factors such as the quality of the colouring material or the content of the pictures that may cause the senior to feel this way.

This is why the type of colouring material used is very important. Some seniors may consider crayons to be childish as compared to colour pencils (although there are seniors who prefer crayons). If the colour pencils are not properly sharpened, seniors may find it difficult to colour, leading them to be frustrated.

Another tip to improve the senior's participation is for their loved ones to be involved in the colouring session as this can further motivate the senior during the session.

The content and the picture also play a part in setting the mood for the colouring session. If possible, try to offer different types of pictures for the senior to colour on.

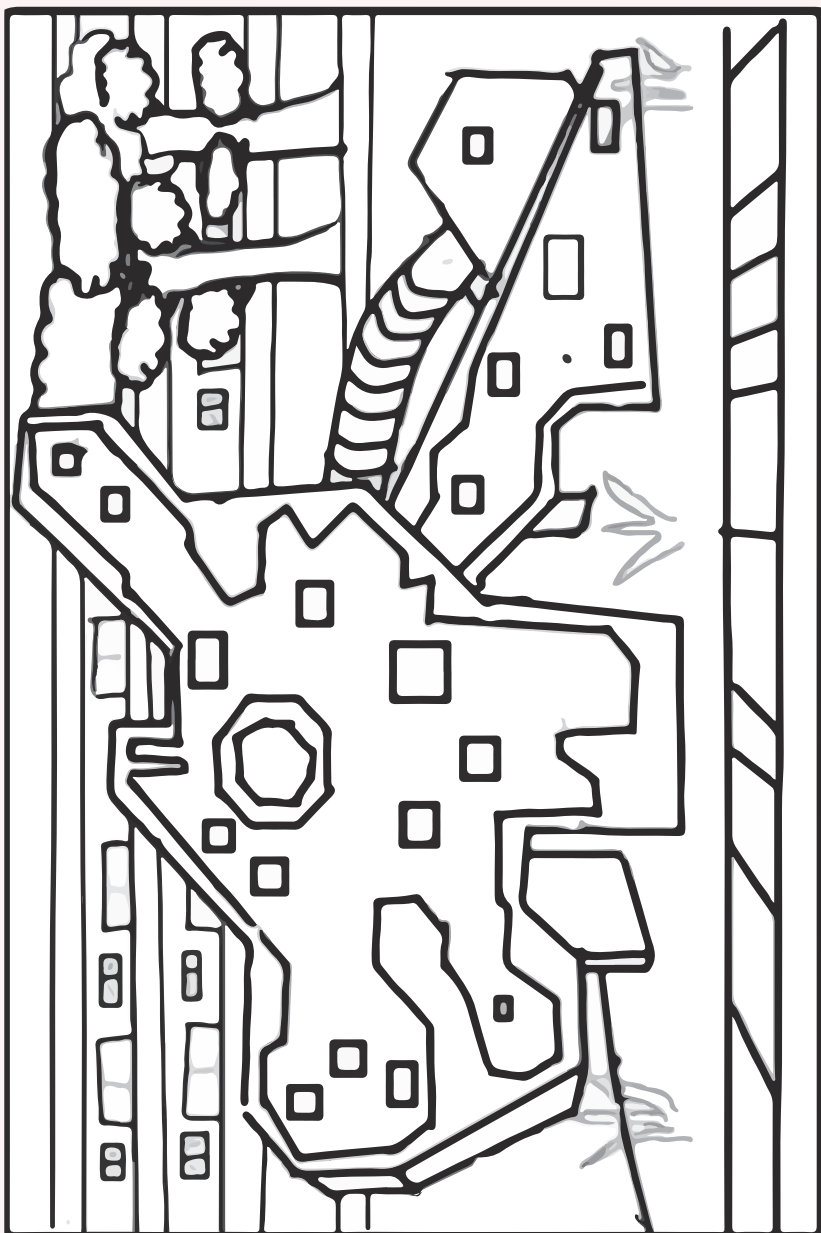
Here are some examples of possible themes:

- Nature
- Flower/Fruits/Trees
- Animals
- Streets And Landmarks (particularly places that the senior is familiar with)

### **Communication during the session**

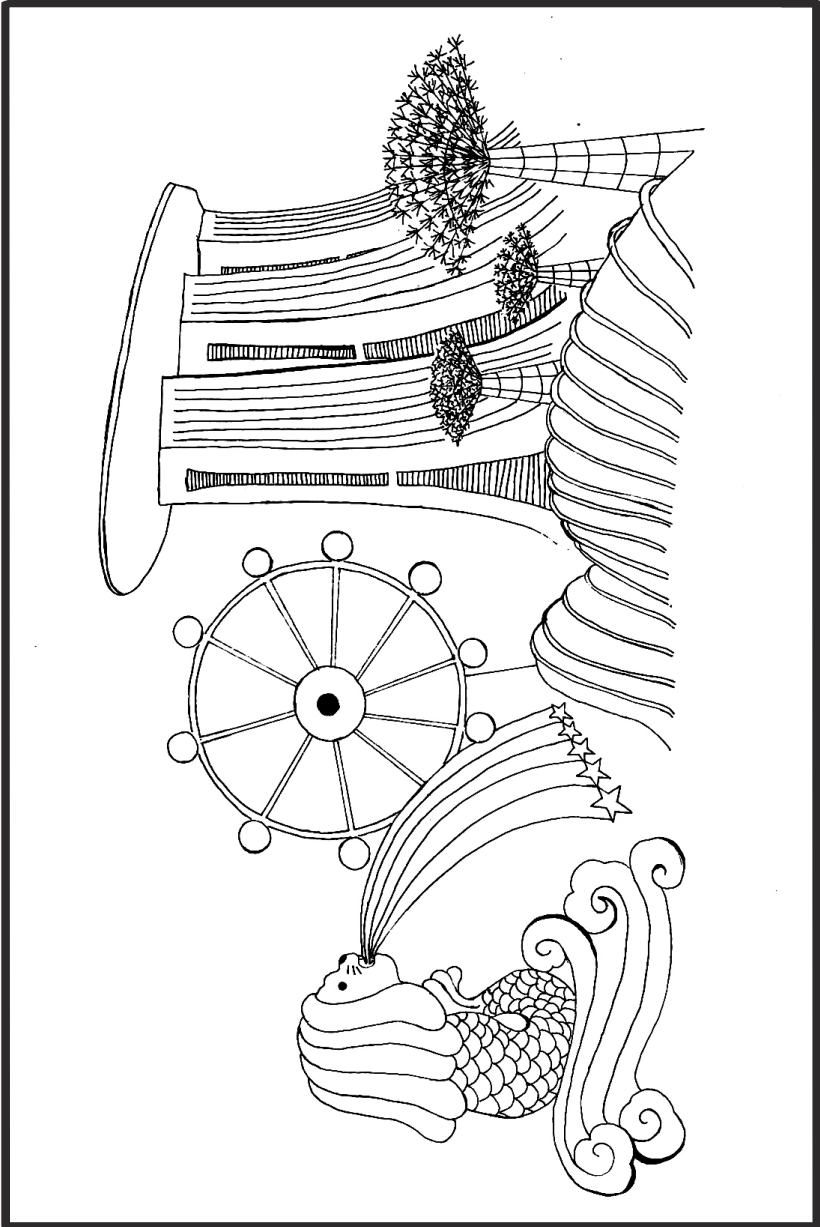
It is always good to communicate with the senior during the colouring session and encouraging and praising their art can boost their confidence tremendously. During the session, caregivers can also ask the senior about the colour they use and if the picture reminds them of anything from their past.

Remember that colouring is a form of self-expression. Each colour chosen by the senior may have some meaning to them, and there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to colour. Most importantly, they should have fun and find the colouring session meaningful.



Picture Sample One

Picture Sample Two



# CHAPTER 12

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## CAREGIVING FOR SENIORS - A PRACTICAL GUIDE

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By promoting healthy self-care, the '**Caregiving for Seniors – A Practical Guide (2nd Edition)**' hopes to provide caregivers with the resources and knowledge they need to foster a better and smoother caregiving journey ahead.

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The information in this handbook is correct at the time of printing.  
Printed in January 2021.