

CAREGIVER EMERGENCY QUICK START GUIDE

What To Do When An Aging Loved One's Health Suddenly Changes

Caring for an older adult can feel manageable...until something happens. A fall, new diagnosis, or a hospitalization can leave families scared and unsure of the next steps.

When You Notice a Sudden Change

If your loved one seems "not like themselves," start here.

Check for:

- memory changes or confusion**
- sudden weakness**
- dizziness or fainting**
- shortness of breath**
- Urine odor**

Important: Sudden changes can signal serious medical issues. When in doubt, seek medical attention immediately.

After a Hospitalization

Before discharge, ask:

- 1. What diagnosis was given and how to manage at home?**
- 2. What new medications were prescribed and side effects to expect? any medications added, removed, or changed?**
- 3. What warning signs should we watch for at home?**
- 4. Any referrals to follow up on? follow up care? Ask for names and numbers.**

Medication Safety

Medication mistakes are one of the common reasons seniors return to the hospital.

Things we can do to prevent medication errors:

- **keep an updated medication list that includes dosage, quantity, and time of day**
- **use pill organizer if needed**
- **ask pharmacist about interactions**
- **keep note of any side effects**

Quick Home Safety Check

After an illness or hospitalization, fall risk increases.

Walk through the home and check for:

- Loose rugs**
- Clutter in walkways**
- Poor lighting**
- Slippery flooring**
- Stairs without handrails**
- Low toilet seats**
- Shower and toilet area with no grab bars**
- Bed too high or too low**

Make sure there is a clear pathway to all exits.

Signs More Help May Be Needed

If you notice any of these signs, it may be time to consider professional support:

- **frequent falls**
- **missed medications**
- **confusion/wandering**
- **poor hygiene**
- **weight loss**
- **repeated hospitalizations**

Don't Forget the Caregiver

Caregivers often ignore their own stress.

Watch for these signs:

- **constant exhaustion**
- **irritability**
- **trouble sleeping**
- **depression**
- **feeling overwhelmed**
- **skipping own appointments**

Next steps

You don't have to navigate this alone. Professional guidance can help families:

- **Understand care options**
- **Plan for Safety**
- **Coordinate services**
- **Reduce stress and uncertainty**

If your situation feels urgent or confusing, reaching out for support can make a big difference.