

Enhancing Daily Life

Adding pleasurable activities to your loved one's daily life can improve his or her outlook and might help make your caregiving day go more smoothly. We all need to find pleasure in our daily lives. Some of the most important care you give won't have anything to do with medicine, baths or feeding. A laugh or a shared cup of tea is as important for our well-being as a daily dose of vitamins. Good health is more than a healthy body. You both will live better and enjoy life more if you care for emotional and spiritual needs as well as physical needs.

Encourage social contacts: Caring for another person can dramatically change your social life. It may be hard for you to get out and socialize. Friends may no longer come to visit or include you in their activities. You and the person you care for may begin to feel lonely and isolated.

These ideas may help you both to keep up your social contacts:

- Getting out to visit friends may be difficult for you but you can encourage others to visit. Ask them to come for a cup of tea or a game of cards.
- Be honest about your limitations. "I'm just not able to invite you for dinner but we would love to have you stop by for some dessert later."
- If it is hard for others to visit, suggest they send cards or letters, or make short phone calls.
- Help put visitors at ease. If friends seem uncomfortable around the person, explain the illness if that seems helpful. "John's illness isn't contagious. It does make him short of breath, so talking tires him out."
- Offer suggestions for visiting. For example, Mom would love to have you paint her finger nails or Tom enjoys having someone read the travel section to him. Or, it is difficult for Mary to talk about current events due to her dementia but if you open the pages of her photo album she can entertain you with stories of her younger days growing up on the farm with five brothers.
- A successful visit doesn't have to revolve around conversation only. Read aloud, take a walk outside, or watch a sport together; these activities are often more enjoyable for all.
- Find out about adult day away programs and seniors centers.

Adult day away programs offer supervised activities for seniors and for adults with disabilities that include music, exercise, meals games and craft projects. These programs also give you, the caregiver, regularly scheduled breaks. You can choose to see friends, enjoy a game of golf, garden and relax without worry. In Muskoka and Parry Sound, contact The Friends 1-888-746-5102 for information about programs.

If you care for an older person, they may enjoy organized activities at a seniors centre. Both of you may be able to participate in activities together; or you might find separate activities occurring at the same time. You may discover new friends you enjoy.

Include pleasant activities in your daily schedule. Research has shown that frequent pleasant activities help reduce symptoms of depression in caregivers and the people they care for.

Here are some ideas:

- Share a funny story or joke together.
- Go outside. Go for a ride, visit a park, and drive in the countryside.
- Rent a video, make some popcorn, and have a night-in at the movies.
- Bake together.
- Enter contests you read about on the back of cereal packages or in magazines.
- Work in the yard together. A person in a wheelchair can pot and water plants placed on a table.
- Play a board or card game and change the rules if necessary.
- Look through magazines and find a new recipe to try.
- Make a tape recording of family stories. Reminisce together. Older persons especially enjoy thinking and talking about old and often happier times)

Monthly support groups are held for family caregivers, people with Parkinson's', MS and recovering from stroke and their family members. All are welcome to attend these informal free sessions. Assistance may be available if you need respite or transportation to attend. For times and locations, contact 1-888-746-5102.

Presentations can be made to any size group on such topics as community resources, caregiving, hospice/palliative care, and prevention of abuse to older adults. Books and educational videos are also available from our lending library.