

Caring Matters

Home Is Where The Heart Is!

The story of a special lady, Nanette Higgins, as told by her daughter Louise Winship. Nanette will be remembered, above all, for her kindness, friendliness, sense of humour and strength. With the help of Living Assistance Services, Nanette was able to spend her latter years in the comfort of her own home. Nanette is pictured here with her granddaughter, Robin Winship.



When I received a brochure in the mail from David Porter, the Director of Living Assistance Services, I carefully filed it away knowing that Mom was adamant about remaining in her own home. We respected that.

After three hip operations my Mom was living in a nearby bungalow which was terrific because we all believed she could manage on her own. However, though she recovered nicely from her hip surgery, we soon learned that a knee replacement would also be required. While Mom had been walking with a cane prior to the knee surgery, it was evident she would need a wheelchair, and likely home-care, after the operation. Mom's physical limitations were a problem. She wanted to do things on her own but we didn't feel comfortable leaving her alone. She had an emergency "Lifeline" call system to summon help in the event of an emergency, but it didn't seem right to be in a position only to help **after** something happened.

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Home Base can be "Home Safe"

By: Mary Ellen Tomlinson

In the game of baseball, "safe" means to successfully evade being caught by the players on the opposite team to arrive at home plate. Planning makes the difference between hearing the referee shout out at home plate "safe" or "out". Safe is the word we want to hear.

Older folks need to be "home safe," too. A well organized home can keep older folks safe from falls and scalds, which are two major hazards for permanent disability. Injuries from falls are one of the primary reasons seniors are placed in Long Term Care Facilities, and they are the leading cause of death from injury for the elderly. Rugs, electrical cords and stairs are the principal culprits for falls in the home.

A rug's beauty is not worth a broken hip; if a rug's edge is not flat to the floor it can trip people. Apply double-sided tape to anchor the rug edges flat to the floor. If you can't get the rug's edges to stay flat, the rug must go.

Reading lights and phones close to a favourite chair are convenient, but if the cords dangle loose then these cords can cause falls. Make sure cords are clear from pathways; anchor them to the floor and use duct tape if necessary. Don't be embarrassed to use duct tape in your home, it is now considered to be a Canadian badge of honour!

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HAPPY NEW YEAR

In This Issue

An up-close-and-personal story about a special family's efforts in caring for a loved one and a general article on Family caregiving and related stress.

Save a life! 3 crucial tips in recognizing a stroke victim and you may be surprised to read a study on effects/downside of vitamin E.

See the "Home Safety for Seniors" by Mary Ellen Tomlinson of Senior Care Options and lastly, (good news), Healthy Trends for 2007!

Director's Message

From all of us at Living Assistance Services, please accept our best wishes for a happy and healthy New Year.



This is the season when many of us take stock of our past, while we also plan for our future. Like each of us, our agency is constantly evaluating our ongoing efforts with a view toward providing an improved level of service and care to clients and care recipients alike.

As we approach our seventh year in the home care profession we thank you again for your support and encouragement.

Vitamin E: Beneficial or Not



A recent study by a cardiologist at McMaster University Hamilton, Ontario, has de-bunked the widely held conviction that the antioxidant vitamin E, is useful in preventing cancer and heart attacks. Dr. Eva Lonn also calls for more testing of vitamins and herbal supplements, saying "the general public, as well as physicians, often believe that, even if there is no definitive proof of benefit, there is no

harm associated with vitamins or other natural products. Our study demonstrates that the potential for risk exists." Dr. Lonn's team studied 9,500 people aged 55+ over a period of almost 10 years. Far from supporting the "harmless" theory, the McMaster group found harmful outcomes for vitamin E consumers.

They found the patients taking vitamin E had a higher risk of heart failure and hospitalization for heart failure. Furthermore, they found no significant differences of cancer incidents for patients taking vitamin E and those receiving a placebo. The best way to determine the advantages or disadvantages of vitamin E is to discuss its long term use with your family physician.

(source: Journal of the American Medical Association, March/05)

Family Caregiving and Stress



Cornell University researchers found that senior mothers are four times more likely to choose a daughter as their caregiver, regardless of that child's competing interests such as family commitments, or that child's problems including substance abuse and mental health. The study was made up of 566 mothers in Boston and many participants said that the gender of their caregiver was the primary reason for selecting that child. Study authors say that mothers prefer daughters as they have more shared experiences, and mothers may feel embarrassed if their sons have to help them with personal care tasks.

Many Canadian seniors, aged 65+ and living at home reported that they required assistance due to long-term health problems. *(cont on page 3)*



"As you age, your secrets are safe with friends, because they can't remember them either."

Jane Seabrook

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Home Base can be "Home Safe" *(cont from page 1)*

Hallways need safe non-skid flooring surfaces, and carpets in good repair. Check floors and stairs surfaces in your home to make sure they are unobstructed, well lit and free of clutter. Put a nightlight between the bedroom and the bathroom. In the middle of the night, it will light the way and prevent the hazard of tripping or banging into obstacles.

Kitchens and bathrooms need extra attention since they are considered to be the most dangerous rooms in the house. Small appliance electrical cords should be curled up and not left to dangle. Better yet, use cordless appliances. Turn pots and pan handles to the side, or towards the back of the stove so that they don't accidentally tangle in shirtsleeves or housecoat sleeves and spill hot foods or hot liquids. Wipe spills off the floor immediately. Bathrooms need grab-bars next to the tub or in the shower. Use tub or floor mats with rubber or non-skid under surfaces. Again wipe up all spills on the floors immediately. Set the hot water heater thermostat at 125 degrees; this temperature offers water hot enough for washing, but not so hot that it will scald, or burn skin.

Finally, clear out household clutter to remove needless obstacles. Local charities and recycling depots will take the stuff you no longer use. The Canadian Diabetes Association will even pick up donations. In the Toronto area, their phone number is 416-746-5757. Safety proofing your home requires planning. Precautions and planning can make the difference between being caught off guard by an injury or being home safe.



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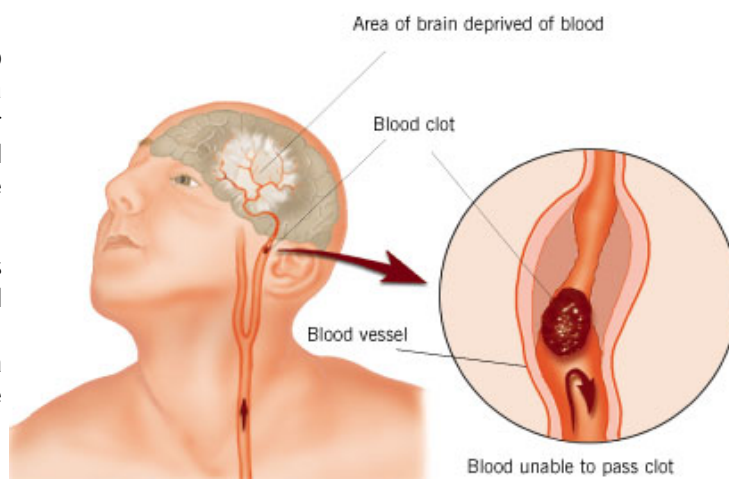
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STROKE: (Remember the 1st Three Letters: S.T. R)

During a BBQ, a friend stumbled and took a little fall. She assured everyone that she was fine (we offered to call paramedics) and that she had just tripped over a brick in the patio because of her new shoes. We got her cleaned up and a new plate of food. While she appeared a bit shaken, Ingrid went about enjoying herself for the rest of the evening.

Ingrid's husband called later telling his hosts that his wife had been taken to the hospital. At 6:00 p.m., Ingrid passed away. She had suffered a stroke at the BBQ. Had those present known how to identify the signs of a stroke, perhaps Ingrid would be with us today. Some stroke victims who fail to get help in time don't die. They end up in a helpless, hopeless condition instead.



A neurologist says that if he can get to a stroke victim within 3 hours, he can totally reverse the effects of a stroke. Totally. He says the trick is to get a stroke recognized, diagnosed, and the patient medically treated within 3 hours, which is tough.

RECOGNIZING A STROKE:

Remember the "3" steps: **STR**

Read and Learn! Sometimes symptoms of a stroke are difficult to identify. Unfortunately, lack of awareness spells disaster. The stroke victim may suffer severe brain damage while people nearby fail to recognize the symptoms of a stroke.

Now doctors say a bystander can recognize a stroke by asking the potential stroke victim to take a simple three step test:

1. **"S"** - Ask the individual to SMILE.
2. **"T"** - Ask the person to TALK and SPEAK A SIMPLE SENTENCE coherently - i.e. it is sunny out today.
3. **"R"** - Ask him or her to RAISE BOTH ARMS.

Another test is this: Ask the person to 'stick' out their tongue. If the tongue is 'crooked' or if it goes to one side or the other that is also an indication of a stroke. If the potential stroke victim has trouble with ANY ONE of these tasks, call 911 immediately... And describe the symptoms to the dispatcher.

(Source: Unsolicited Email)

Family Caregiving and Stress *(cont from page 2)*

Almost half of Canadian seniors receive all their care from family and friends. A large percentage receive a combination of care from both professional sources and family.

To learn the consequences that caregiving has on families and caregivers themselves, it is important to understand the Cornell Study and Canadian statistics which suggest overwhelmingly that middle aged daughters do most of the caregiving of aging parents. In addition, the number of people age 65+ is expected to double by 2026 with seniors accounting for 21% of our population and twenty percent of Canadians aged 45+ will be providing care to a senior. The demographics will dictate that many of us, particularly women, will be balancing the demands of: family, work, social activities, health concerns and caregiving for many years to come.

Findings from a 2002 General Social Survey show the continuing willingness of Canadians to provide care to their family and friends. However, the consequences reported by caregivers can be significant: 21% had their health severely affected; 6% had to move in with the care recipient; 29% reported sleep pattern changes; the death rate of family caregivers is 63% greater than others in the same age group; 44% had extra yearly expenses; 25% had to change vacation plans; and, 6% altered education plans.

(Sources: Cornell University & Canadian Academy of Senior Advisors)

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(cont from page 1)

We located the Living Assistance Services brochure and David Porter introduced a few prospective caregivers to us. Living Assistance Services' mandate is to match caregivers to their clients' needs. We wanted Mom to choose a caregiver. She had been through a lot and, while she was very independent, she now realized she could not do it on her own. Mom and I interviewed several caregivers to ensure the right match and the third interview proved fortunate.

Our first Living Assistance caregiver came to stay with Mom until she recovered from her surgery. After that we briefly contemplated that Mom could cope on her own. However, as we continued to have concerns about her falling, her ongoing heart problems, and new signs of forgetfulness, our family ultimately decided, that for everyone's peace of mind, Mom should have a full-time, live-in caregiver.

We selected Hortie who came to live in Mom's house during the week. She was amazing. We also selected Tricia, a caregiver whom I adored as she was both a friend to me in addition to being a helper for my Mom. A third caregiver, Nieves, took over on weekends and sometimes substituted for Tricia during the week.

In fact, all the caregivers were great and understood Mom's appreciation for her independence. They all sensed when and what needed to be done, but otherwise

allowed my mother to maintain her own space.

Mom was on prescription medications and all the caregivers reminded her to take them regularly. Additionally, the caregivers kept the house incredibly clean and Tricia managed the grocery list to Mom's liking, which was a wonderful help. They became part of our family, which was great. They were really thoughtful and sent cards and flowers to her on her birthday and picked out clothes she liked to wear on special occasions.

We eventually looked into long-term care facilities because we were worried about my Mom's memory loss but decided against it as we felt many of these places were depressing.

We heard stories of long-term care facilities having eight patients to one Personal Support Worker and we were convinced that one-on-one care was the way to go. During one of my mother's last hospital visits, a member of the hospital staff remarked that Mom would never have received as good care in an institution as she received in her own home from her own caregivers.

Shortly thereafter, Mom was bedridden and I contacted David to determine if the caregivers could still cope. The answer was "yes" and the caregivers continued to do everything for her.

Toward the end, my Mom was in a lot of pain and the caregivers did all they could to comfort her. Mom enjoyed being with them when she couldn't

personally attend church any more and the caregivers would sit with her, watch the services on TV and share her faith.

I would highly recommend Living Assistance Services to anyone else in similar circumstances. It's a shame the government can't provide more help for people that can't afford it. My Mom had to watch her money carefully, but having live-in caregivers was worth it for us, and much better than any other alternative.

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Healthy Trends For 2007!

Released in early June, the Canadian Community Health Survey 3.1 provides a snapshot of the health status of Toronto residents that bodes well for the future:

- Only 11.4% are obese (Ontario average: 14.8%)
- Only 29.5% over 18+ are overweight (Ontario average: 32.9%)
- Only 34% had flu immunization within the last year (Ontario average: 32.7%). (source: LHM Report)