

## Keeping Your Aging Parent Safe After a Hospital Visit

by Rebecca Rushing, BSN, RN

For aging adults, a trip to the hospital has the potential to stretch on for several days, and medical procedures can bring a host of new caregiving responsibilities that persist even after the patient heads home.

The truth is, older adults need greater levels of care during a hospital stay, and this translates into greater care requirements after a discharge as well. Often, this involves professional care, as post-operative care and physical therapy both require trained professionals to carry out. It's critical that family caregivers fully understand the requirements and challenges they'll face as soon as possible, which can better equip them to organize necessary care.

### Understanding Hospital Recommendations and Discharge Care

For instance, did you know that family caregivers are not required to accept the hospital's recommendations for post-discharge care facilities, if they have a suitable replacement? Some tasks, like physical therapy, can be carried out at home or in a professional caregiving setting, as long as caregivers can specify these care providers in the discharge document. While this requires more effort on behalf of the caregiver

to organize, it can provide a way to build a more flexible, appropriate care strategy after a loved one leaves the hospital.

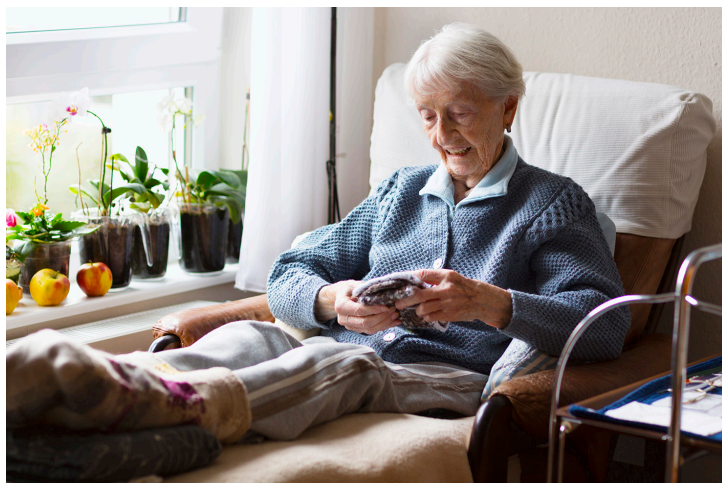
Depending on your loved one's needs, you may decide on a short-term residential care facility, or make other decisions based on their mobility and care needs. Whatever you choose, make sure that the caregiving responsibilities are within the scope you or the professional caregivers can provide. Missed medication and accidents can be cause for hospital readmission, which may make it more difficult to return home each time.

Loved ones may also require additional equipment, like oxygen tanks or wheelchairs. Knowing about these in advance can give you and your family time to prepare the home by removing hazards and making sure it's a comfortable place to rest and recuperate. Finally, coordinate elements of post-discharge care, including observation, wound-dressing or other tasks with other family members, as well as professional caregivers.

### Preparation is Key

Without a plan, caring for a loved one after a hospital discharge can be incredibly difficult. Not only are the care requirements amplified, but caregivers may worry about anything that can go wrong: impaired mobility leading to a fall, drug interactions causing serious health complications, even the possibility of their loved one's health failing to improve. All of these are valid concerns, but they don't have to come true.

Preparing for that discharge should begin as soon as your loved one is admitted to the hospital so that you and your family can put together everything your loved one needs before they're cleared. This can prevent frantic searching for professional care or prevent the mistakes that may come from heightened anxiety and stress.





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*Keeping Your Aging Parent Safe After a Hospital Visit, continued from page 1*

Knowing the specifics of your loved one's post-discharge care, working with the doctors and nursing staff to get a clear picture of their health and knowing your options are all ways to ease the stress and anxiety of caring for a recently hospitalized family member. The best way to prevent something from going wrong is to know what might happen and how to prevent it before it ever does.

By being prepared, you can be sure that your loved ones will receive the best care possible from you and the rest of their care team. Even better, they'll feel well-taken care of if they see you're in control of their situation. Overall, everyone involved can breathe a little easier when the trickier aspects of care are given consideration in advance.

## Closing Thoughts

It's important for caregivers to recognize that a hospitalization can frequently lead to increased care requirements that may last well beyond the hospital discharge or change the way they have to approach care going forward. This can be a scary and difficult time for family caregivers, and those feelings are valid. But preparedness can provide stability and security to the caregiver and help them feel more confident in their own caregiving abilities and the health of their loved one.

When loved ones require more care, it may be appropriate to consider a long-term solution, such as professional in-home care services. If you find yourself struggling to maintain a balance between full-time caregiving and your other responsibilities, in-home care can provide the post-discharge attention your loved ones need when you're at work, or otherwise dealing with the necessities of life. Above all, caregivers can make sure their loved ones receive the best care possible by being present when they can and being prepared to make the right care choices after a hospital discharge. ❖

## Caregiver Question and Answers

*Taken in part from The Caregiver Space*

**Q:** What do I do when I've reached my breaking point as a caregiver?

**A:** Here are some suggestions from fellow caregivers.

I am at my breaking point right now. And the thing that is helping me...is solitude. I find a few minutes throughout my day that is quiet. No phone, tv, people just peace and quiet. Reflect on the positive reasons you are a caregiver. – Kristal S.

Share your feelings with an organization, GP (general practitioner) or support group that may be able to help you. Use this as a means of "sounding off." – Rosie H.

I also find that if I just sit down and make a list of things I am happy about or things I have accomplished... A vocation whether it is a wife, mother, or caretaker of a sick, injured, or elderly person is infinitely more rewarding and meaningful than the world's version of a happy life. – Jamie C.

"Nothing ever lasts for very long." I have found validation in those words through many situations that have come my way. It does seem to keep things in perspective for me. – Patti G.

I took those moments when mom was asleep, to just go outside and grab some gulps of fresh air, some rays of sunshine or even a little bit of rain, to remind me that I was ALIVE. – Sugarpie Hunnybunch

First PRAY and realize it is at that point that you need a break. I keep Starbucks Frappuccinos in the frig for days like this. I pray sing & enjoy a frappuccino! Find what works for you & do it. No one can love you or take care of you in a moment like this better than you! – Eletha A.

I breathe deeply and believe this too shall pass. And it does. Takes a toll though. – Mary M.

Caregiving is not forever. There is always a light at the end of the tunnel. Just remember you are someone's angel and think of where they would be without you. Keep up the good fight! – Mark S.

Every situation is so unique. Getting away would be ideal – completely removing yourself from the situation for as long as possible. Possibly admitting that your personal health is at risk and you've done all you can humanly do and your loved one needs a more skilled placement. – Dulcie N.

Breathe. It's just about the only answer when your family won't help. – Diana K.

Find a place that is all yours. A bathroom, a spot in the yard. Fall to your knees and scream. And while you are down there thank God for how far you have come and ask for the strength to get you through this. And ask someone for help. Hugs and prayers to all who feel this way. My journey is over for the time being. And don't feel guilty for feeling relieved for it being over. – Tina D.

A handful of Oreos and milk helps too. – Gail F.

It's OK to admit you're unhappy or sad and maybe even lonely. Say out loud how you feel, maybe not to the person you care for, but just say it when you are alone. Admission is very releasing. If you can't verbalize what you feel, start a journal. Writing has helped me greatly. – Luci B.

Maybe just turning to the person closest to you and seriously letting them know how you feel and that you really don't know what might happen if something doesn't change. – Vicki H.

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## February's Website

[seniorresources.trualta.com](http://seniorresources.trualta.com)

## Quotes

To love and be loved is like having the sun from both sides.

*- Unknown*

Being happy doesn't mean you have it all, it simply means you are thankful for all you have.

*- Unknown*

With love and patience nothing is impossible.

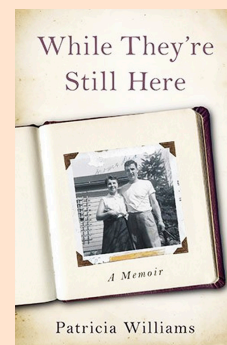
*- Unknown*

## This Month's Book

### *While They're Still Here*

*by Patricia Williams*

After a lifetime of strained bonds with her aging parents, Patricia Williams finds herself in the unexpected position of being their caregiver and neighbor. Williams answers the call of duty with trepidation at first. But by facing each new struggle with determination, grace, and courage, they ultimately emerge into a dynamic of greater transparency, mutual support, and teachable moments for all. Honest, humorous, and graceful, *While They're Still Here* is a poignant story about a family that waves the white flag and begins to heal old wounds as they guide each other through the most vulnerable chapter of their lives.



## Flu Tips for Caregivers

When caring for people who have the flu:

- Avoid being face to face with the sick person. If possible, it is best to spend the least amount of time in close contact with a sick person.
- When holding sick children, place their chin on your shoulder so they will not cough in your face.
- Wash your hands often and the right way. Sing the “Happy Birthday” song two times or count slowly to 20 as you wash.
- If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Make sure to wash your hands after touching the sick person. Wash after handling their tissues or laundry.

### Tips to Prevent Dehydration

Give plenty of liquids at the first sign of flu. Sick people with the flu need to drink extra fluids to keep from getting dehydrated. Mild fluid loss can most often be treated at home. Yet, severe dehydration is VERY serious and must be treated in the hospital.

- If the sick person is not eating well, encourage them to drink liquids. Avoid alcohol or drinks with caffeine in them such as colas, tea, and coffee.
- Older adults and people with kidney problems should check with their doctor about safe amounts of liquid to drink when sick.
- Offer clear fluids such as water, broth, or sports drinks.
- Use a squeeze bottle or a straw for people too weak to drink from a cup. Or offer ice chips or ice pops to suck on. ❖

Caregiver Question and Answers, continued from page 3



Create a sacred space in your own home where you can be alone for even 5 minutes. Or ask someone to be with you in person or phone for 5-10 minutes, and simply ask them to listen with 110% attention without responding. – Jay K.

I love M & Ms so I buy a bag and my favorite magazine and just enjoy myself for a little while. Always helps. I also have literally screamed into a pillow to let out my frustrations (making sure my loved one can't hear). Sometimes the hardest thing is not to feel guilty if you enjoy yourself. I have to tell myself it is an ok thing. – Dianne M.

Even if you can't physically get away, try to carve out as many “mini-breaks” as you can during a day. – Jeannette L.

Hospice can help get relief for the caregiver. – Antoinette H.

Step back...regroup...and remember why you do what you do. And the lives you've made better and the hearts you've touched with your love and compassion. – Debra J.

Make sure you eat healthy. It seems crazy but good food does help. – Jana B.

Take a break. Cry if you need to. Scream if you need to. Rinse and repeat. – Michelle S.

5 more minutes, then another 5 more, count to 60 and then again, say a prayer, hold your breath for a minute or so, say another prayer, count to 60 again and then force yourself to get up, go for a walk, garden, meditate, whatever until you reach that stillness inside of you which no person, no event or circumstance can touch, remind yourself of who you are, why you are doing what it is you are doing and then go and do that thing. – Virginia B.

Meditation. Peace and quiet. Those things have saved my life. Also, some Prozac has been very helpful. My Facebook friends have also helped a great deal. I have found that your breaking point will stretch. – Kerry D.

Talk to someone you trust. Have a good hard cry. Cry until you get it all out. – Bobbi C.

Go lay down on the closest piece of grass you find and look at the sky, take a deep breath, cry, and then get up and get at it again... – Rachel S.

My aunt takes me out once a week to an hour comedy show and the laughter is a great release. – Danielle H.

I keep a prayer journal. Quite often I rant. But usually I start writing down all that I am thankful for. – Maribeth C. ❖

# Caregivers: 6 Tips to Keep Yourself Safe

This list is designed to help decrease caregiver accidents and injuries that may prevent you from providing care for their loved ones. After reading this you will be able to identify ways to provide a safe environment, move your loved one safely, protect yourself from medications and infections, and make a plan to care for yourself.

## 1. Know your environment

Whether you have moved in with your loved one or they have a space in your home, arranging a safe space is very important for minimizing accidents.

Hazards inside the home include pets, equipment, medications, clutter, poor lighting, and rugs. Safety outside the home includes being knowledgeable about the neighborhood, yard, and parking area. Know the location of the closest hospital, police, and fire departments. If the yard is uneven, having a ramp for wheelchairs will prevent you from pulling or pushing. Park your car in well-lit areas and as close to the front door as you can. Avoid stairs, gravel, and wet areas if possible.

When going to the doctor or stores with your loved one, use handicap areas to load or unload your loved one into the car. These areas typically have ramps, even ground, and large spaces so that you can help your loved one without hurting yourself.

Clear walkways, remove sliding rugs, organize equipment, and minimize furniture and obstacles. Small equipment can be stored in baskets or plastic containers with labels. Larger equipment could be moved along the wall, out of the walking path. Use closet or garage space if available.

Familiarize yourself with the location of commonly used care items, such as linen, cleaning supplies, toiletries, incontinence care products, medications, replacement tubing, dressing supplies, etc. Organize them into a designated cabinet or room.

## 2. Use Body Mechanics

Proper Body Mechanics Basics:

- When moving your loved one, assess the area and plan.
- Communicate each step with your loved one. If they can help move themselves, let them.

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This crave-worthy Valentine Snack Mix is perfect for February! It's filled with cereal, pretzels, M&M's, and coated in melted white chocolate. No baking required 35 min. 370 calories per serving

Ingredients:

- 2 cups Corn Chex Cereal
- 1 cup Miniature Pretzel Twists
- 2 cups Rice Chex Cereal
- 2 cups Honey Nut Cheerios Cereal (or plain Cheerios)
- 1 bag Valentine's M&M's (red, white, pink)
- Add White Chocolate Chips (just under 2 bags)
- Add Canola Oil (or vegetable)
- Add Valentine Sprinkles (Optional)

1. Combine ingredients: Combine all the ingredients in a large bowl. The bigger the bowl, the easier it will be to evenly coat everything with white chocolate.

2. Melt white chocolate: Add white chocolate to a separate bowl and melt in the microwave. Once melted, work quickly, because white chocolate hardens fast.

3. Pour the white chocolate: Pour it right on top of the snack mix, using a spatula to scrape every bit of melted chocolate onto the mix.

4. Toss: Once the chocolate is on the mix, use two large spoons to quickly (but gently) toss the mixture until the white chocolate coats everything.

5. Transfer the mix: Spread onto a parchment-paper-lined sheet pan.

6. Drizzle: If desired, add an additional white chocolate drizzle on top of the snack mix. ❖

# Fatty Liver

Source: Mayo Clinic

## 1. Metabolic Syndrome

Metabolic syndrome (high cholesterol, triglycerides, blood pressure, and insulin resistance) are strongly linked to fatty liver disease. “Metabolic syndrome may be the most common and serious condition you’ve never heard of,” says Robert H. Shmerling, MD. “While each component of metabolic syndrome can cause health problems on its own, a combination of them powerfully increases the risk of having cardiovascular disease (including heart attacks and stroke), diabetes, liver and kidney disease, [and] sleep apnea. And this only a partial list. It’s likely we’ll learn about other health risks associated with metabolic syndrome in the future.”

## 2. Type 2 Diabetes

“Diabetes raises your risk of nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, a condition in which excess fat builds up in your liver even if you drink little or no alcohol,” says M. Regina Castro, MD. “This condition occurs in at least half of those with type 2 diabetes. It isn’t clear whether the condition appears more often in people with type 1 diabetes than in the general population because obesity, which is a risk factor, occurs with similar frequency in both groups. Other medical conditions, such as high cholesterol and high blood pressure, also raise your risk of nonalcoholic fatty liver disease.”

## 3. Too Many Carbs

A diet heavy in carbohydrates is linked to fatty liver disease, doctors say. “If you eat too many carbohydrates and proteins, they can be converted to triglycerides,” says gastroenterologist Deepa Shah, MD. “These are stored in the fat cells and can be deposited in the liver. Insulin resistance can lead to increased triglycerides and increased uptake of fatty acids in the liver, causing further accumulation of liver triglycerides.”

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*Caregiver: 6 Tips to Keep Yourself Safe, continued from page 5*

- If moving to a wheelchair or walker, bring it as close as possible to the bed or chair.
- Face your loved one.
- Stabilize your feet, bend your knees slightly and keep your back straight.
- Use both arms and keep you loved one close to you.
- Squat down and stand up to lift.
- Do not twist your back, move your feet, and turn together, lower into wheelchair.

Assistive devices are important to the caregiver. Examples include gait belts and grab bars for stability. An elevated toilet seat and wheelchair provide less distance to lift or move.

If they are unable and you cannot move them alone, do not move them. Talk to their doctor about getting additional help or assistive equipment. These include adjustable beds, Hoyer lifts, and chair lifts.



## 3. Falls

Even when all safety procedures are followed, falls can happen. If your loved one starts to fall and you catch them, you can slowly lower them to the ground against your body. Do not trap yourself under them.

If they are able to walk, help turn them over to their hands and knees and assist them off the floor using proper body mechanics. If your loved one has fallen alone or they are unable to move, do not try to lift them yourself. Call for emergency assistance.

If assisting someone from the floor and they are close to sturdy furniture, such as a couch, have them pull up on the furniture instead of you.

## 4. Medication and Supplies

Medications and supplies that are treatment for your family member could be harmful to you. Wear gloves when giving certain medications. Crushed or split tablets, liquid, patches, topical creams, and chemotherapy are medications that absorb through the skin.

The effects depend on the medication. Topical creams and powder from crushed tablets can cause numbness, burning, and rash. Topical patches with pain medication and nicotine can cause dizziness, blurred vision, confusion, shortness of breath, and loss of consciousness.

All needles and syringes should be disposed in sharps containers to prevent needle sticks. If you do get stuck by a used needle, clean the area immediately. Next call your healthcare provider and they will instruct you. They will ask about your vaccine history and if the needle was used on someone with an infection.

## 5. Infection Prevention

Do not jeopardize your health. Staying well is vital to your ability to care for your loved one. Ask visitors to stay away if they are ill.

Handwashing should be the first priority. Wash with soap and water if your hands are visibly dirty. You can use hand sanitizer in between. You should wash with soap and water after about 5 uses of sanitizer, even if your hands don't look dirty.

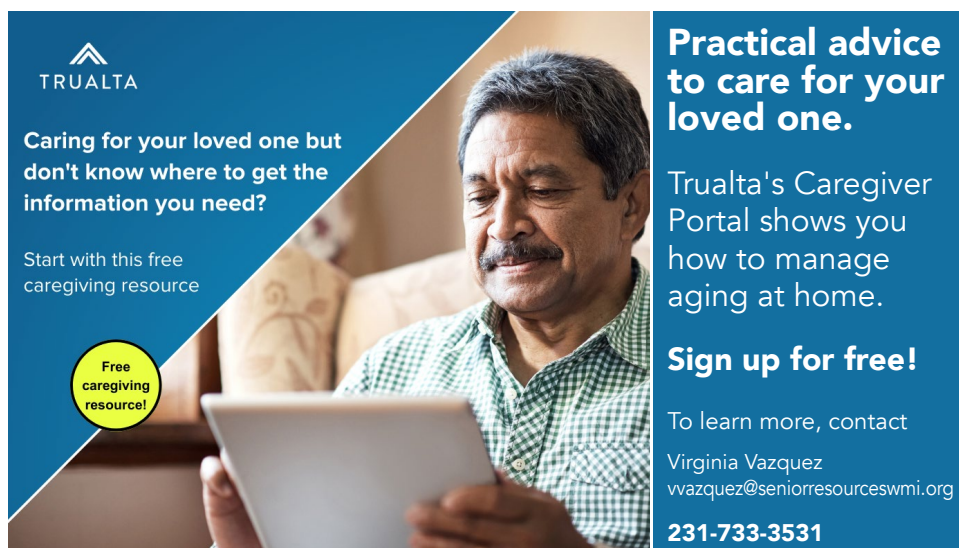
Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. You can hum the song "Happy Birthday" to practice! Use gloves, masks, drapes, or any other available protection when providing incontinence care, cleaning open areas on the skin, and maintaining catheters or drains.

## 6. Reducing Stress and Preventing Burnout

Caring for a loved one can cause emotional and physical strain. Taking steps to reduce stress will help prevent burnout. There are support groups that help build coping strategies and offer socialization and encouragement

Here are some quick tips:

- Do not overload your responsibilities; ask for help from other family members. Make a list of tasks and split them up.
- Connect with your community. Learn about companies that provide assistive care with meals and transportation for the disabled and elderly population.
- Allow yourself to rest. Follow a daily schedule that includes short rest periods. When you need longer breaks, find respite care.
- Give yourself credit. You are doing a great job providing care to your loved one! ❖



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*Fatty Liver, continued from page 6*

## 4. Being Overweight

Being overweight or obese is one of the main causes of fatty liver disease—if not the main cause—experts say. “75%, three quarters of the patients who have fatty liver disease are overweight,” says Dr. Wakim-Fleming. “So what drives the fatty liver disease is being overweight. So, the last 15, 20 years has shown a parallel rise in weight and in fatty liver disease because they go hand in hand. That trend occurs in children as well as in adults. For now, it's involving about 25% for the population in the United States and worldwide and is expected to double in the next 15 years. So, this is becoming a very serious issue, and it's becoming the leading cause of end-stage liver disease, cirrhosis and transplantation, one of the leading causes along with alcohol.”

## 5. How to Treat Fatty Liver Disease

It's important to reverse fatty liver disease before it causes serious damage, experts say. “That's a very, very common question, and sometimes we are frustrated because we tell our patients to do a few things,” says Dr. Wakim-Fleming. “Number one, since most of the time it is tied to obesity, we want them to lose weight. If they have diabetes, we want to treat the diabetes. If they have high blood pressure, we want to treat the high blood pressure. That vicious circle of the metabolic syndrome, we need to break it. If they have abnormal lipid profile, their cholesterol, triglycerides, LDL are elevated, we want to treat those. All of this helps because all these factors, the diabetes, the blood pressure, abnormal lipid profile, maybe some endocrine disorders such as hypothyroidism, all of those contribute to deposit of fat in the liver, so we want to treat each one of these elements to break that cycle and help the fatty liver.” Eating a Mediterranean diet and drinking up to three cups of coffee a day may also support liver health. ❖



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