

Baby, It's Cold Outside

by Jennifer Bradley

In many areas of the country, cold weather is an old-forgotten nemesis that reappears this time of year. When caring for those with disabilities and seniors, caregivers must take some simple precautions to ensure a loved one's safety this winter season.

Temperature Control

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that 600 Americans die each year from hypothermia, half of whom are older than age 65. Hypothermia occurs when a person's body temperature drops from the normal 98.6 degrees to 95 degrees or below. Seniors and those with disabilities are at a greater risk if conditions such as arthritis and a variety of medications diminish their response to cold temperatures.

Layering is not just a fashion trend; it serves a purpose, especially for those susceptible to dangerous temperatures and if a home is prone to drafts. Use lighter layers of clothes nearest the body and make them easily removable and also a non-hassle to put back on. Layers trap warm air between each layer, keeping the body warmer.

When outside, keep a loved one's exposed skin covered, including head, face, ears, hands, and feet. A couple things to remember use mittens versus gloves since they allow the fingers to touch and generate heat. Next, make sure a loved one's clothes are loose fitting since tight clothes keep blood from flowing and minimize the production of body heat. Proper footwear is also something a caregiver should examine and see is proper for the season.

Maintaining an even, warm house temperature is essential during the cold weather season. A caregiver should make sure the thermostat is easy to read, perhaps with large digital numbers, so a loved one can check it frequently. The National Institute of Health recommends at least 68 to 70 degrees as a standard and says that even mild cold temperatures such as 60 to 65 degrees can cause a hypothermia risk for seniors.



Stay Safe

Many times, cold weather is the cause of power outages. Both darkness and cold are situations a loved one does not want to find themselves in without some preparation and knowledge of what to do.

Many people with disabilities and seniors rely on powered devices for medical care such as oxygen or for mobility. Always have emergency numbers easily accessible and an emergency kit with easy-to-use items available. A generator is a great source of backup power. A caregiver should walk their loved one through its use and the emergency plan before such a situation arises.

For many loved ones, travel is hard during the cold winter months. A caregiver can be an advocate by eliminating any unnecessary travel, shopping for their loved one and encouraging family members and friends to visit at the loved one's home. Take advantage of the nicer, sunny days and don't push medical appointments that can be put off if the cold is too extreme or snow too deep. Another option for medical appointments is for a caregiver to investigate a visiting physician service if travel is too difficult.

A big safety issue in wintertime is falls. A caregiver can help prevent this common injury-causing scenario by keeping

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Mission

To provide a comprehensive and coordinated system of services designed to promote the independence and dignity of older persons and their families in Muskegon, Oceana, and Ottawa – a mission compelling us to target older persons in greatest need but to advocate for all.



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sidewalks and door entryways clear. Think of things that might cause a loved one to go outside. The mail? Pets? Appointments? A caregiver can be available or have someone nearby to assist with these daily tasks while the weather is less-than-desirable.

Don't Worry, Be Happy

Cabin fever isn't just for newlyweds taking refuge in a north woods cabin. Many seniors struggle immensely with this season of isolation and Vitamin D deprivation.

Remind a loved one to drink plenty of water, eat well, and exercise indoors as much as possible. Many senior-friendly exercise videos are available.

Encourage socialization by inviting friends and family who can travel for a visit. "Brain" games such as word and number puzzles and simply reading the daily paper help a loved one maintain a sense of connection during the long winter months.

Keeping warm isn't the only thing on a caregiver's to-do list during the cold season. Ensuring a loved one is safe, and content are also important and will make for a faster, happier winter for all. ❖

The Healing Power of Music

by Steve Toll

What better "medicine" than a "treatment" that has only positive side effects and "therapy" that is enjoyable? That is the "miracle of music" when applied with intention. Music is shown to have the ability to help organize the brain, especially vital to those who are living with Alzheimer's.

Usually after twenty minutes of music, there are observable effects, such as singing, foot tapping, and clapping. Studies have shown that the results of a musical therapy session last for several hours afterward. Positive results include elevated mood, increased socialization and appetite and reduction in agitation. These benefits are attributed to the stimulation the brain receives during a music therapy session, a sort of "cognitive workout" inspiring us to coin the phrase, "What exercise is to the body, music is to the brain." The power of music often inspires physical movement and can be used in combination to encourage gentle exercise.



As speech, writing, and traditional forms of communication are compromised, music provides an alternative means of maintaining a connection, thereby helping to normalize interaction between caregiver and patient. Music used therapeutically creates an environment where the patient can be nurtured and cared for in a way that is safe, gentle, and appropriate. Music is central to maintaining human bonds when those with dementia have lost the ability to initiate communication or to respond verbally.

The powers of music when focused and used therapeutically are many. Critical to maintaining quality of life for those with Alzheimer's is management of emotions and preserving the connection with others. Music is conducive to keeping those connections strong if possible while helping the participant to focus, increase awareness and orient to the environment. Several research studies have looked at music therapy as an important adjunct to medical treatment and findings suggest a possible link between the use of music and slowing the progression of dementia.

From the rhythms of the heartbeat experienced in the womb to the stirring sounds of a marching band, rhythmic patterns and music surround us. Language itself has a musical quality to it and from the beginning of mankind, as expressed through chanting and drumming, resembled music more closely than speech. Music is primal to life and expressed by each of us every day whether through dancing to a favorite tune, keeping rhythm with a pencil or remembering a special time when hearing a forgotten melody. It is central to our lives and is embedded in our culture, defining how we acknowledge milestones, rites of passage and celebrations as well as providing comfort, transformation, and inspiration. Music links us to our world and provides a pathway back to our past.

You don't need to have any special musical training to institute a therapeutic music program. You will need to select appropriate music, however. This music consists of familiar tunes from the '30s, '40s and '50s with more contemporary music included, depending on the preference or age of the participant. Check in your own home for possible sources of music. Your local library is a good source. Consider individual preferences and select music that is singable and upbeat. ❖



January's Website

www.caregiver.org

Quotes

Spread love everywhere you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier.

- Mother Teresa

Although no one can go back and make a brand-new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand-new ending.

- Carl Bard

Just when the caterpillar thought her life was over, she became a butterfly.

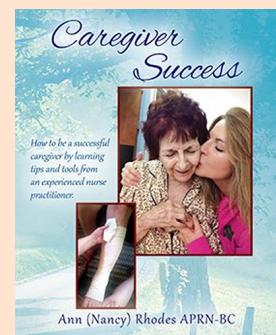
- Unknown

This Month's Book

Caregiver Success

by Ann (Nancy) Rhodes APRN-BC

A how-to picture book filled with practical tips and medical tools created by an experienced home care nurse practitioner. This book is intended to empower the caregiver—be it the home health aide, family member, you as you are aging, and for all health professionals who have patients who need information about home care and medical procedures for care, by preventing unnecessary hospitalization or suffering.



CAREGIVER'S 10 COMMANDMENTS

Always ♥ ♥ ♥ Always

AGREE ~ Never Argue

REDIRECT ~ Never Reason

DISTRACT ~ Never Shame

REASSURE ~ Never Lecture

REMINISCE ~ Never say "Remember"

REPEAT ~ Never say, "I already told you"

SAY "DO WHAT YOU CAN" ~ Never say "You can't"

ASK ~ Never Command

ENCOURAGE AND PRAISE ~ Never Condescend

REINFORCE ~ Never Force

Caregivers, review this checklist before the weather gets bad

Being without electricity is not an option for patients who rely on oxygen machines. Closed roads and stores mean no medications, food or supplies when there is a natural disaster.

Hospice teams that visit patients in their homes are well-versed in preparing for severe weather. They will bring extra medications and supplies before the storm hits to ensure their patients are never at risk. The team may even suggest a patient spend the duration of the storm in a hospice inpatient unit.

If the forecast calls for severe weather and you're taking care of a seriously ill loved one, here are a few tips to help you weather the storm. In fact, keep these tips in mind for any natural disaster, from fires to heat to hurricanes.

Be Prepared

1. Well in advance, tell your power company if someone in the home is oxygen-dependent to receive priority service or the loan of a generator.
2. Many communities offer programs in winter to help seniors with snow removal and heating costs.
3. Post the phone numbers of the patient's physician and hospice in or near your phone. Include the numbers of the local fire department, EMT and others you may need to contact in an emergency
4. Make sure cell phones are fully charged in the event you cannot use your landline. Charge laptops, tablets, and other devices.

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5 Ways to Help Loved Ones Deal with Grief

by Rebecca Rushing, BSN, RN

When a loved one's partner passes away, it can be difficult for them to deal with the ensuing grief. As a family caregiver, you might feel powerless to help, especially when processing the loss of the loved one yourself. But there are some things you can do to help ease the burden and support the survivor.

As a family caregiver the grieving process can be different for you, too. Having both lost someone close to you, it may help to reminisce about old times, or find ways to celebrate their partner's life, as you both grieve and heal together. In addition, here are five ways to help your loved one deal with grief and loss:

1. Talk About Grief Counseling and Professional Assistance

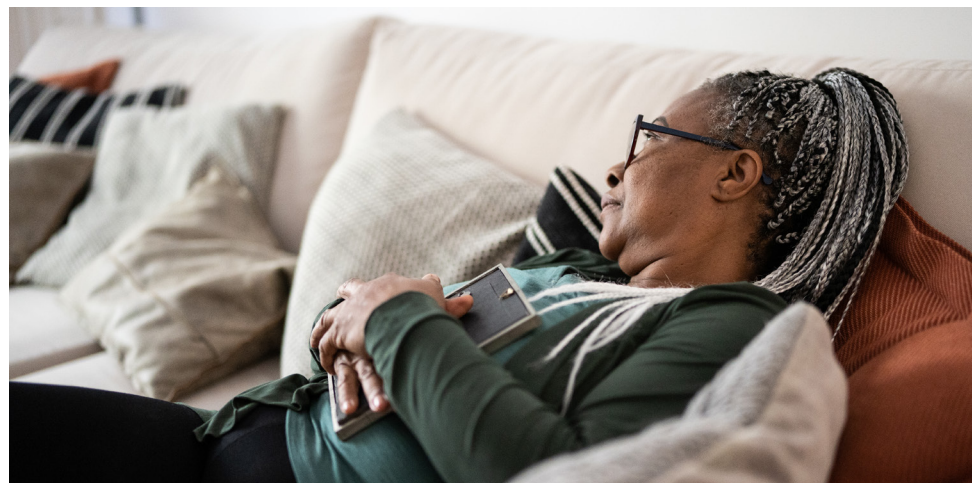
For older adults, the grieving process can be a difficult one. Family caregivers may find that their loved ones grieve differently than they do, and will often be more severely impacted, especially if their relationship lasted for decades. For these individuals, losing such a large presence in their lives can make it difficult to find a new normal, and finding ways to process their changed state can be a struggle.

Family caregivers should talk openly and honestly with their grieving loved ones about the possibility of grief counseling and therapy and provide assistance in finding quality counseling services. This can provide care recipients with the opportunity to find the help they need in processing their deep emotional pain.

2. Offer Your Own Support and Time

After the death of a loved one, older adults can be filled with profound loneliness and fear. For the family caregiver, this time can be difficult, and may leave them feeling unable to help or provide the emotional care that their loved one needs. In many cases, sharing time, energy and compassion can go a long way to helping loved ones feel more secure in themselves and their lives.

However, dealing with the needs of another may also make processing your own grief more challenging. If you feel like you're struggling to meet their emotional needs or failing to take care of your own, it is okay to ask for space. You might consider working with your other family members and loved ones to offload some of your responsibilities, giving you time to rest your body and mind. Caregiving





is a difficult task, especially after the death of someone close, and it is important to remember to take care of yourself too.

3. Provide Opportunities to Be with Others

To help their loved ones avoid isolation in such an emotionally difficult time, family caregivers should provide them with the opportunity to spend time with friends and family, including children and grandchildren, whenever possible. Take care not to overwhelm them but work to build a culture of care and support if you can.

4. Help Them Become More Independent

In some relationships, loss of a partner can also mean the loss of certain life skills, like cooking. Understanding which household responsibilities a partner was in charge of, and taking those on, can be a struggle for many older adults.

After some time has passed, consider talking to your loved one about taking a cooking class, or learning some of the tasks that their partner left behind. As a caregiver, it can also be helpful to step in and take some of these on yourself, or delegate them to other members of the family so nothing gets left behind.

5. Be Open with your Loved Ones

Finally, it's important for family caregivers to give loved ones time and space to process that grief. Make sure to ask about what they want and need, and what would help them carry on in light of their grief. Focus on providing access to the things they believe can help in the grieving process, from assistance with daily living tasks to access to more in-depth care if necessary.

Losing a partner, especially after so many years, can have impacts that ripple throughout every part of your loved one's life. As a caregiver, your priorities should be to help them reach the emotional healing that they need and to give them the opportunity to feel like they have control in their lives.

Family Caregivers Can Provide the Strength to Carry On

As a family caregiver, you can provide the stability that your loved one needs to adapt in the face of their tragedy. By spending a little more time with them when they need it, helping them find external support, keeping them from feeling isolated and being a comforting presence, caregivers can help their loved ones make it through these trying times. ❖

5. Ensure you have flashlights with working batteries. Have extra batteries on hand.
6. Check that all smoke alarms have working batteries.
7. If you use alternative heating such as kerosene, have a working carbon monoxide alarm.
8. Keep bottled water on hand for drinking, cleaning, cooking; a gallon per person per day is recommended. Fill the bathtub with water for toilet flushing in case the power goes out.
9. Have a battery-powered radio to stay up to date on weather conditions in your area.
10. Fill your car's tank with gas and maintain good winter tires.

If You Lose Power

1. Keep the patient as warm as possible with extra clothing and blankets. Watch for shivering; this is the first sign the body is losing heat, which could mean hypothermia.
2. Conserve heat by closing off all unused rooms.
3. Place rolled up towels in cracks at the base of doors and windows.

Things to Remember

1. If you must go outside, dress in layers; stay as dry as possible.
2. When shoveling snow, avoid overexertion by taking frequent breaks.
3. Drive only if necessary. If you must drive, stay on main roads and don't travel alone.
4. For more information on preparing for a winter emergency, visit:
 - Ready.gov
 - NHPKO Preparedness Resources ❖

Why are Seniors Always So Cold?

by Tena L. Scallan

As we age, our bodies become sensitive to cold temperatures. This is because of a decrease in the metabolic rate. Our aging bodies are not capable of generating enough heat to help maintain the normal temperature of 98.6 degree. In addition, thinning of the skin is another factor that may contribute to the “feeling of cold” in older adults. The increased sensitivity to cold or feeling cold more than usual can mean that your loved one is suffering from mild hypothermia.

Facts about hypothermia

Hypothermia is a condition characterized by extreme low body temperatures. When the temperature of the body falls below 95 degrees, your body can suffer from hypothermia. When the temperature drops below this level, then sensitivity to cold sets in.

Factors that contribute to cold sensitivity in old age

With old age the physical capability undergoes a decline, and the body doesn't work the way it used to earlier. A drop in temperature can make our loved ones feel very cold, even if they are dressed up in warm clothing. There are various studies showing that older people have low body temperatures as compared to their younger counterparts. However, this doesn't always mean that they should feel cold round the year.

Various factors that contribute to cold sensitivity include:

- Low blood pressure
- Poor metabolic rate
- Loss of elasticity of the blood vessels
- Thinning of the fat layer beneath the skin. This is responsible for fat conservation. Which eventually keeps the body at the right temperature
- Exposure to cold water

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Traveling with a loved one and the wheelchair

From Caregivers newsletter

Just like caregiving, traveling with someone who requires a wheelchair is something that most people probably never give any thought to until they must do it. The world is not always an easy place to maneuver a wheelchair. Traveling when you're caring for someone in a wheelchair requires a little more preparation and planning than you may be used to, but the extra effort doesn't mean you should shy away from it. These tips should help you if you're thinking of taking your caregiver life on the road.

Hotel Tips

When booking a hotel, ask if they have accessible rooms available. This may require booking over the phone because sometimes you can't select for that online. Confirm with the hotel that their accessible room has the features you need. Sometimes, “accessible” doesn't mean the same thing to the hotel as it does to you – sometimes all it means is that there are grab bars in the bathroom. There are “accessible” rooms in which a wheelchair or commode chair won't even fit through the bathroom door. Likewise, there are “accessible” rooms that don't have a wheel-in shower. Be sure to specifically ask for the things you need.

Ask to ensure you can get into the room with a wheelchair – but don't assume just because they say yes, it's true! People who don't have to maneuver the world on wheels don't see everything that could stand in the way. A hotel who says, “Yes, you can get into the room with a wheelchair; there's a ramp!” may have a ramp from the parking lot onto the sidewalk but could have overlooked a four-inch step from the sidewalk into every room.

Even if you aren't usually one to plan out things in advance and prefer to travel spontaneously, it may be prudent to plan when traveling with someone in a wheelchair. Especially if you'll be going through rural, small-town areas that may not have many hotel options. Try to at least get an idea in advance of which hotels have accessible rooms. If there are not a lot of options, book them so that you don't end up somewhere without a bed that your loved one can get to.

Road Trip Tips

If you're driving very far, rest stops are inevitable! If the trip is one that you're going to be taking frequently, use the first time to find the accessible, convenient places to stop that are big enough for wheelchairs. If possible, scope it out yourself beforehand without your loved one. If not, be sure to start looking for stops well in advance of when your loved one will really need one – this will give you a cushion if it takes longer to find an accessible place than you anticipated.

If there are no family restrooms, but just a men's and a women's, you may have to ask someone working there to block the bathroom so that you can go in with your loved one and not freak anybody out. Or, if you're specific about which side is easier to transfer from, you may need to use the opposite gender restroom because of the way they are set up. Be aware that all these things are possible, and don't be shy about asking people working there to help – they are almost always willing to do anything they can to make things easier.



General Travel Tips

Allow lots of extra time – all the transferring and moving of the wheelchair and maneuvering around obstacles will make every stop take much longer than you think it will.

Don't forget the comfort of your loved one! Some people may not be comfortable sitting for hours on end, so taking a long road trip may need to be broken into smaller, more manageable days. If your loved one gets cold very easily, bring extra blankets.

Start a packing list well in advance and add to it as you think of things that you'll need to remember. Write down everything you use daily during that time. And don't forget all the medical stuff. Some of the things to think about:

If incontinence is an issue, remember a drop sheet and an under pad for the bed, or a plastic sheet to protect beds. Pack enough briefs for the trip, plus extras in case of an accident.

If you care for a stroke patient who needs thickened liquids, don't forget the thickener. Therapy items needed daily.

Remember that things can happen – even on the road –so be prepared! Keep a current list of your loved one's medications (including frequency and dosages), any important medical documents, contact information for your home doctor and hospital, and always notice those hospital signs on the road in case you need one!

Start small – if you know that you will be taking a long trip in the future, consider giving travel a try first on a weekend getaway close to your home. That way, you can discover what things you may have forgotten or didn't think about without the risk of being clear across the country.

With a little bit of planning ahead and preparedness, traveling with someone who uses a wheelchair is not that difficult. If you and your loved one like to travel, it's well worth the extra effort just to get out of the house and continue doing things you both enjoy. ❖

- Side effects of certain medications such as beta blockers, calcium channel blockers
- Physical problems
- Certain medical conditions such as thyroid disease, high cholesterol to name a few

Medical Conditions contributing to being cold

- Anemia
- Poor blood circulation
- Diabetes
- Thyroid complications

Signs of cold sensitivity

- Shivering even when the room temperatures are not too low
- Skin turns pale
- Breathing rate becomes slow
- Memory loss
- Drowsiness
- Hands begin to fumble
- Confusion sets in
- Senior becomes exhausted
- Speech becomes slurred
- Undue fatigue
- Loss of coordination

Tips to keep senior warm when they are cold

- Raise the room temperature should keep it warm.
- Give seniors warm beverages but avoid all forms of alcoholic beverages. However, if they are unable to swallow the drink, don't force them to.
- Avoid using anything hot or warm directly on their skin.
- It is also not advisable to give any form of massage.
- In case the senior is wearing wet clothing, it is advisable to remove those clothing first and put on the dry ones.
- Use an electric blanket, or you can even consider putting layers of blankets or sheets to keep them warm.

Feeling cold even in the warm climates is a signal that a person should see a doctor. All the above-mentioned tips should help caregivers keep their loved ones warm. ❖



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