



**Comfort  
Keepers**<sup>®</sup>

a *sodexo* brand



# From Head to Toe

A Practical Guide to Seniors' Mental Health  
and Well-Being



## What You'll Find in This Guide

Learn useful information about the moments in life that open new doors and create opportunities to draw closer to your senior loved ones.



Info Center

### JUMP TO A MOMENT

Click on a category to the right to go directly to that section. Or, click on the arrows at the bottom of the page.



### REACH OUT

Need to talk? [Contact us](#) with any of your questions; we can't wait to help you.

# 80%

*of seniors have at least one chronic health condition.*

- AMERICAN  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION



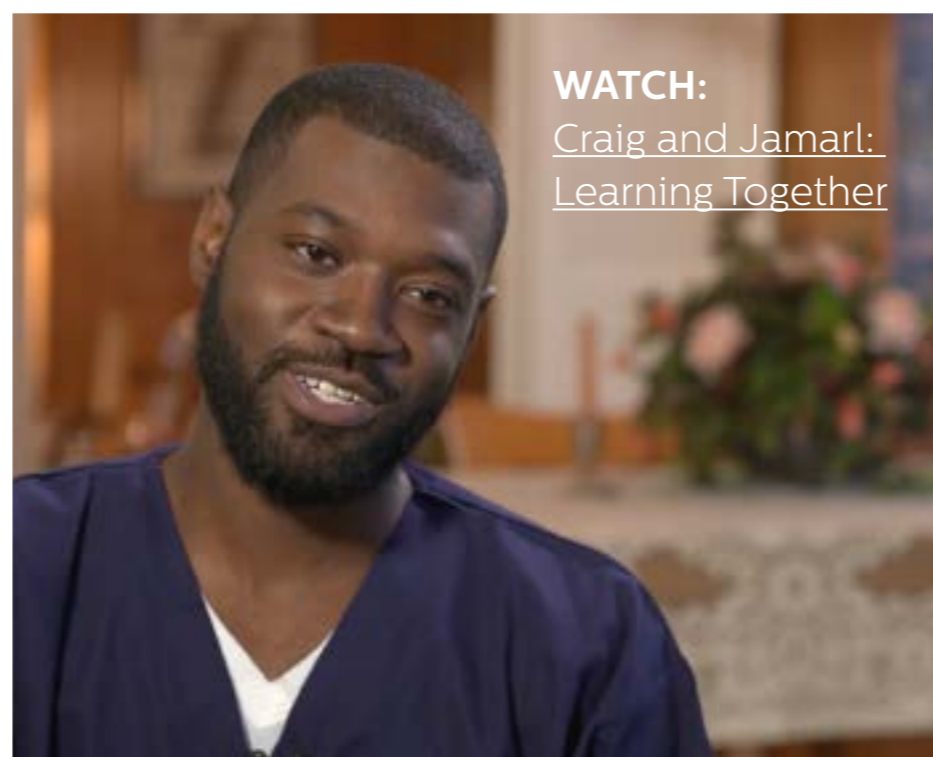
# From Head to Toe: A Guide to Mental Health and Well-Being

## Changing the Way We Think

Mental health and well-being encompass so much more than just our emotions and thoughts. In this guide, we've prepared a head-to-toe look of what it means to stay healthy and happy, no matter your age. What do we mean by "head-to-toe"? Well, people tend to think of the mind and the body separately. But mental health is unquestionably tied to physical health. In our line of work, we see firsthand that even the smallest change can influence your loved one's quality of life. We think that preparedness and forethought can help you and your family take these changes in stride and adapt to a new normal.

## What is Normal?

By definition, "well-being" is the state of being comfortable, happy, and healthy. And because aging is an individual journey, no two people's "normal" is the same—in fact, we're constantly forming new definitions of "normal." To help you navigate these changes, we've collected resources to help you understand and bolster the well-being of your loved one.



**WATCH:**  
[Craig and Jamarl:  
Learning Together](#)



**READ:**  
[Socialization Blog Post](#)

**1 IN 8** people over 65  
has Alzheimer's  
disease  
- ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION



# What You Need to Know

Resources to help you prepare  
and plan



## Feeling Forgetful

Forgetfulness is a common part of getting older. Our brains can be trained to work more efficiently—but just like muscles in the rest of our body, there is an element of “use it or lose it.” In general, forgetfulness is normal, but memory gaps can be frustrating. For young people, it’s easier to brush off lapses in memory, but seniors can feel like forgetfulness is the beginning of something much larger. However, there are common and non-threatening reasons why it’s harder to remember things as we age. For example, older people often experience a decrease in blood flow to the brain, which may cause memory gaps.\*

Another common cause is that the body produces lower levels of the hormones and proteins that protect and repair brain cells. Neither of these is necessarily a cause for alarm. Everyone, no matter our age, faces some level of forgetfulness. If you’re caring for an older adult, you may be worried by changes in his or her memory. But take a step back; forgetfulness doesn’t always indicate something more sinister.

*\*According to the [American Psychological Association](#)*

### PLAY:

[Step back to 1967 with some trivia](#)



## What's Common?

Forgetfulness can be a normal part of aging as the brain changes. We've included examples of common forgetfulness; you probably experience many of these yourself! However, if your loved one's memory tips into the behavior on the "Signs Your Loved One May Need Help" list on the following page, consider writing down some of these instances and talking with his or her doctor. Something more serious may be going on, but that's not always the case.

To help keep the brain sharp at any age, research has shown that games can promote brain health.



### Common Forgetfulness

Occasionally forgetting where they left objects that they use often

Occasionally missing an appointment or meeting on their schedule

Walking into a room and forgetting why they entered

Having a harder time retrieving information that they just learned

Cycling through several family members' names before saying the correct one

Being unable to explain things quickly and with precise details

Having the "on the tip of my tongue" sensation

**PLAY:**  
Positive affirmations  
word scramble

**PLAY:**  
Keeping the comforts of home  
word search

## Starting the Conversation

Talking about your loved one's forgetfulness can feel like an intimidating feat. He or she shouldn't feel backed into the corner or as if you've made a decision alone. Actively listening to his or her responses is always a step forward on the path to better understanding. Remember, some forgetfulness is common. A good reason to have these conversations is to garner a baseline for what "normal" means for your loved one. This can help you identify changes down the road.



“Hey, I noticed that it's been harder for you to (find your keys/pay your bills on time/meet your appointments). Why do you think that is?”

“I saw that you got really upset and kind of confused when we were at the restaurant the other day. What brought that on, do you think?”

“When we were talking about your appointments the other day, you didn't mention this appointment. That's all right! Should we write it down next time?”

Another way you can have these conversations is to ask your loved one about a story from his or her past.



## Signs Your Loved One May Need Help

Being unable to perform basic Activities of Daily Living (ADL) and Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL)

Becoming disoriented or lost in a familiar environment

Frequently misusing, mispronouncing, or garbling words in conversation

Difficulty controlling emotions when making decisions; acting out inappropriately

Excessive memory loss or not recognizing loved ones






# The Weight on Our Shoulders

Grief plays a large role in the mental health and well-being of seniors. Seniors can feel that they shouldn't express their emotions; they can sometimes worry that vocalizing their grief and sorrow may drive away the people they're closest to. As we take our head-to-toe look at mental health and well-being, we've reached the shoulders. It's common for us to carry the brunt of the sadness and depressive feelings that we face on our own shoulders. Metaphorically speaking, our shoulders are weighed down with the burden of loss and sadness. And as we age, loss unfortunately becomes a more present part of our lives.

For seniors, becoming familiar with loss does not make it any less painful. Now more than ever, it is important to help your loved one reach out and process the emotions that they're feeling. This can be done by knowing what grief-related depression looks like and [how to help](#).

Even if a person with depression is surrounded by love and support, they can still feel alone. Socialization is key to encouraging better mental health, and with enough positive stimulus, it's possible to help your loved one feel less depressed. Additionally, depression can stymie our ability to advocate for ourselves. You may ask them, "What can I do to help?" but in response, they say, "Nothing." Instead, put forethought into what action you can take to help. For example, say, "I'm going to make you dinner, is that okay?" This actionable request shows that you've considered his or her needs and want to help, while also taking the burden off your loved one to provide the direction.



  
**WATCH:**  
[Three Friends. One Story.](#)





# Good Food for the Heart and Mind



It comes as no surprise that a healthy, balanced diet helps us be our best. In fact, your parents probably instilled that truth in you from a young age. Not only does food keep our bodies strong and our brains active, it is a strong tie to past memories. Smells and tastes are deeply tied to our memories, and even as taste and smell begin to fade, the sensation of familiarity is still there.

In addition to a healthy diet, hydration is key. Water helps you digest food, absorb vital nutrients, and get rid of unused waste. As a rule, seniors should drink at least eight, 8-ounce glasses of water every day. Some seniors find that drinking a glass of water first thing in the morning revitalizes them and starts their day off on the right foot.\*

Eating healthy meals is another excellent way for seniors to feel good and stay healthy. Having a healthy body can help your brain as well. Sharing a meal with your loved one promotes mental health and well-being in several ways. Not only will you have great conversation, but you can also encourage healthy eating. Wouldn't your loved one be thrilled if you brought a meal over to share? Between the good company and good food, you have a winning combination! Here are some options you might consider adding to your recipes to encourage healthy eating.

**READ:** [Health Eating Tips for 65+](#)

*\*Check with your loved one's physician before increasing fluid intake and for possible food restrictions.*

- Whole, enriched, and fortified grains and cereals\*
- Brightly colored vegetables like carrots, broccoli, or bell peppers
- Deeply colored fruit like apples, oranges, melons, and berries
- Low and non-fat yogurt and milk
- Dry beans and nuts, fish, poultry, lean meat, and eggs for protein
- Foods with high water content, like lettuce, soups, and vegetable juice

\*According to the [Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics](#)





# Armed With Ideal Care

## Creating a Safe and Accessible Home

In our “Moment by Moment” guide, we focused on quality of life and provided a [list of questions](#) that you and your loved one should ask at a doctor visit. Today, we look at options such as specialized care, sleep, and exercises your loved one can do at home to encourage great mental and physical health.

## How to Ask About Specialized Care

A pediatrician works with children, an oncologist treats cancer, a cardiologist understands the heart. Why shouldn't a geriatrician work with your loved one? For many seniors, a geriatrician is an excellent choice to turn to when age-related issues compound on each other. These doctors are trained to recognize the entire process of aging, from top to bottom. You can find out more information about geriatric specialists and find one in your area by visiting [healthinaging.org](http://healthinaging.org).



# Staying Safe at Home

We all stub our toes and stumble from time to time, but these incidents can be much more frightening to older adults and those who care about them. People over 65 have a significant chance of being hurt or even dying as the result of a fall or other home incident. Here are some ways to keep your loved one safe, especially when he or she is alone.

## Know the Causes: Common Risk Factors

- Changes in balance and gaits
- Loss of hearing
- Loss of vision
- Medication side effects, like dizziness or dehydration
- Mobility issues caused by arthritis, stroke, UTI, or diabetes
- Untrimmed toe nails that can snag on carpet or rugs, or make it uncomfortable to wear shoes
- Environmental factors like loose carpet, cramped spaces, or tight furniture

## Creating a Safe and Accessible Home

- Encourage participation in balancing exercises
- Check vision and hearing periodically
- Review medications with a doctor to be aware of side effects
- Ensure good lighting and remove tripping hazards
- Have ample walking space in between furniture
- Invest in a walking aid, such as a cane or a walker





# Sleep Disorders and Mental Health

The [CDC recommends that adults sleep for eight to nine hours a night](#). Unfortunately, there are many factors that impact our good night's sleep as we age. Sleep problems could stem from a personal habit like drinking caffeinated beverages or smoking cigarettes, or from an illness or disorder, such as restless leg syndrome. Talk with your loved one's doctor about possible solutions for severe sleep problems. In the meantime, encourage your loved one to try the following:

- Maintain a regular nightly routine that includes avoiding harsh light, food, alcohol, and caffeine
- Go out into the sunlight during the day to keep a regular [circadian rhythm](#)
- Think positive thoughts to boost his or her mood
- Exercise the amount recommended by a doctor or professional, but avoid exercising within three hours of bedtime

## Low Impact Exercises

By doing at least 30 minutes of low impact exercise every day, not only will your loved one feel better, but he or she may have an improved mood and sleep architecture as a result.

**REDUCE MENTAL STRAIN:** Research indicates coloring promotes relaxation and reduces stress and anxiety.

[Download our inspirational coloring pages.](#) Enjoy!



## EXERCISES FOR SENIORS

Read: [13 Moves to Make You Healthier and Stronger](#)



“I would walk out the door and never worry when my dad was in the care of his *Comfort Keeper*, Matt.”

- **AMY**, *Talking about her dad’s Comfort Keeper®*

“I treat them like I would treat my family... I think you have to love what you do.”

- **LUANN**, *Talking about her client*

“How would I describe my *Comfort Keeper*? Sensational, she’s terrific. I’m so lucky to have Lori. We cook, we like to talk a lot, we take walks, we are just good together. My children are ever so grateful for Lori, she has impacted my life enormously in every way.”

- **ROZ**, *Talking about her Comfort Keeper®*

## The In-Home Alternative to Assisted Living Facilities

In the U.S., 87 percent of seniors would prefer to live in their homes as they age. And this makes good sense; their memories were made there, and they take ownership and pride in the home they’ve made. Staying in a familiar environment can help keep your loved one grounded and happy as he or she ages. By staying at home, it’s also much easier for your loved ones to keep their existing social circle intact.



**WATCH:**  
*Three friends living under one roof*



## In-Home Care Considerations

In-home care, like the [services provided by Comfort Keepers®](#), combines the benefits of staying at home and the mental stimulation of meeting a new acquaintance. When an in-home caregiver visits your loved one, a true relationship is formed. This relationship exists outside your loved one's normal sphere of influence, so communicating with a caregiver offers a chance to learn new things and have a unique form of socialization. In-home caregivers don't just help around the house; they provide companionship to your loved one. These caregivers are compassionate people who derive real joy from helping others and learning about others' experiences.

In-home caregivers have a keen eye for your loved one's mood and safety.

**19.9**  
MILLION  
AMERICANS

*provide unpaid care to an adult 75 or older.*

- STANFORD UNIVERSITY

While family caregivers generally enjoy helping their loved one, the [strain of caregiving](#) can also cause feelings of stress, guilt, or frustration. [This research](#) from the Stanford Center on Longevity highlights how shifting demographics are colliding with the high demands of being a family caregiver.



## What's Next?

To help you create a clear path for moving forward, we've included resource links to help you research caregiving options.

If you ever have questions—or just want someone to talk to—please don't hesitate to reach out. Thanks for taking the time to read our guide, and remember to look for the joy in every moment of life.

### **Serving Clients Throughout Montgomery County**

(301) 284-3412

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## More Resources

### **ABOUT COMFORT KEEPERS**

**Frequently Asked Questions  
about Home Care:**  
[ComfortKeepers.com](https://ComfortKeepers.com)

**The Comfort Keepers Difference:**  
[ComfortKeepers.com](https://ComfortKeepers.com)

**Interactive Caregiving:**  
[ComfortKeepers.com](https://ComfortKeepers.com)

**Advice and Guidance on Care Options:**  
[ComfortKeepers.com](https://ComfortKeepers.com)

**Why Comfort Keepers:**  
[ComfortKeepers.com](https://ComfortKeepers.com)

**Caring for the Caregiver:**  
[ComfortKeepers.com](https://ComfortKeepers.com)

### **MENTAL AND PHYSICAL WELLNESS**

**The Key to Maintaining Brain Health:**  
[ComfortKeepers.com](https://ComfortKeepers.com)

**Health and Well-Being in  
Older Adults:**  
[Nih.gov](https://Nih.gov)

**Treating Depression in Older Adults:**  
[SamHSA.gov](https://SamHSA.gov)

**Coping With the Loss of a Spouse:**  
[ComfortKeepers.com](https://ComfortKeepers.com)

**Solving Sleep Problems in Seniors:**  
[ComfortKeepers.com](https://ComfortKeepers.com)

**Fun, Low Impact Exercises  
for Seniors:**  
[ComfortKeepers.com](https://ComfortKeepers.com)

### **ACTIVITIES**

[Coloring pages](#)

[Word search](#)

[Trivia](#)

[Word scramble](#)

[Recipe cards](#)

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