

## Finding the Care You Need – What Would Help Look Like?

The need for supportive help, like all things, falls on a spectrum. In this case from obvious and essential to just going along because the son or daughter insists. But don't fall prey to pride and dismiss the suggestion of getting help when others recommend it. It is important to realize that as mobility decreases or cognition weakens, even during brief periods of "being on the ropes," being safe at home means reducing the risk of the calamitous event that could lead to hospitalization, to further functional decline and eventually, to making living at home impossible. No doubt, especially for the proud and capable that choose to move to Lathrop, having help in the home does suggest giving up some independence, and some privacy. But, if your goal is to remain safe at home, the first and for some the hardest step is accepting help when its time.

Many choose to white knuckle their way through, insisting on managing on their own. Or they depend on a spouse whose own physical or emotional limits might become unsafely burdened. And some wait until the need becomes unavoidable (see "calamitous event" above). For our consideration let's begin looking at *care that is obvious and essential*- after a life changing event like a stroke, as a result of debilitating arthritis, or perhaps after a serious accident or surgery. Regardless of who provides the care, it is first important to have a good understanding of what's needed. In the long term, rehabilitation and accommodations to the environment may lessen the need for care, its frequency or timing. But we begin by assessing someone's ability to safely perform what are called the **Activities of Daily Living**:

Bathing,	Grooming (i.e. hair care, shaving, oral care),
Toileting (including hygiene)	Transferring (to and from bed/chair/toilet),
Dressing (including shoes/socks),	Walking (including climbing stairs),
Eating (plate to mouth)	

Safety, of course, is a relative term, and is in many cases, under assessed by the person most at risk. Cognitive issues can amplify safety risk, as can pain and the use of pain and other psychoactive medications. A person's impulsivity and history of risk taking should be taken into consideration. In addition, their level of anxiety, which might normally impede risk taking, could just as well compound the likelihood of bad judgement.

In putting together a *Plan of Care*, it's important to consider a person's normal habits. When and what do they like to eat? How often do they prefer to shower? Is the person up several times at night to go to the bathroom? And though this can change, what is their bowel habit? Answers to such questions will be part of determining when assistance is needed. The bottom line consideration of how much help is needed, when and how often may come down to the question of whether this person can get themselves out of the chair or bed and to the toilet when nature calls. As mentioned, their ability or inability to plan, to wait for scheduled assistance or signal their need appropriately would likely increase the demand for, and the duration of needed help. Placement of a bed or chairside commode might be a practical accommodation, and for men the use of a urinal. Safety equipment like bars and ramps may

also be able to improve someone's safety and independence. It is recommended that you take advantage of licensed therapists, which are likely covered by Medicare, before doing any installation.

If the decline is long and steady, the kind of help we're discussing may come as an undeniable last resort. But if the changes come after a hospital or rehab stay, our experience is that, despite the expense, the privacy loss or the general inconvenience, it's always better to have more help than you think you need. There will be a lot to figure out, and having extra, experienced hands may make the difference between a successful homecoming and a return trip to the hospital. You can always scale back.

*[Next time we consider the kind of help that can hopefully prevent trouble...and help the kids or spouse feel more confident about independent life at Lathrop.]*