

# senior review

FREE

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## in this issue...

- ▶ Moving Past Joint Pain
- ▶ How to Trip- and Fall-Proof Your Home for Elderly Loved Ones
- ▶ What to Do After Visiting Elderly Loved Ones for the Holidays and Realizing Changes Are Needed
- ▶ Coping with Caregiving
- ▶ An After the Holidays Checkup Insights into Walking the Life-long Path of Aging – Well!

## Happy New Year!

A Senior Magazine for Living a Healthier, Smarter and More Active Life in Rock County



## Moving Past Joint Pain *by Mercyhealth*

Many people live with joint pain by making subtle changes in their daily routine. You may not even notice the ways you're accommodating discomfort—parking closer to the grocery store, choosing a route with less walking or skipping favorite hobbies. If joint pain is preventing you from enjoying everyday activities, it's time to address it.

Your primary care provider may refer you to orthopedics. Orthopedic providers treat the musculoskeletal system, including the ligaments and tendons that support your joints. Joints are protected by cartilage, which acts like a cushion.

If you feel joint pain or stiffness in the morning, you're likely experiencing inflammation. This is a normal part of aging and can be an early sign of arthritis. Any time you're still for a while, like lying in bed or sitting in a chair, your joints may need time to "warm up" because inflammation can build and cause pain.

A warm shower and gentle movement can help relieve morning stiffness. An anti-inflammatory like ibuprofen may also help.



Once cartilage wears down to a certain point, treatments like injections, joint replacement, knee braces or physical therapy may help alleviate pain. Sometimes, something as simple as a knee brace or cane can take pressure off your hip or knee when walking.

### Prevention

Movement is critical for joint health. Activities like walking, jogging and light weightlifting can strengthen your bones and joints. Moderation is key. Don't overdo it; that can cause harm as well.

Maintaining a healthy weight helps reduce stress on joints. Supporting your overall health also protects your bones and joints. Calcium and vitamin D are the building blocks of healthy bones. Some people also find joint supplements or anti-inflammatory diets helpful.

To learn more about orthopedic services at Mercyhealth, visit [mercyhealthsystem.org/ortho](http://mercyhealthsystem.org/ortho) or call (888) 39-MERCY (63729).

## Heart Health Boosters ❤

A recent study has shown that dog owners are more likely than non-dog owners to reach the recommended physical-activity guidelines of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity per week. "You're walking for the pet, not just you. It gives that extra motivation," says Yvette Johnson-Walker, DVM, PhD, clinical instructor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's College of Veterinary Medicine. In fact, some doctors suggest getting a dog to their patients with cardiovascular issues – moderate-intensity walking is as effective as running in lowering blood pressure and cholesterol.



Source: Health.com

## Shrooms on the brain



which acts as an antioxidant and anti-inflammatory.

A new study conducted by the National University of Singapore suggests that eating cooked mushrooms regularly may help preserve cognitive function later in life. The six-year-long study showed that those who ate more than two servings per week cut their risk of mild cognitive impairment in half. Scientists believe this may be related to a compound found in mushrooms called ergothioneine,

Source: Health.com

## Care for the caregiver



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# How to Trip- and Fall-Proof Your Home for Elderly Loved Ones

Creating a safer living environment for an older adult doesn't require a full renovation—just thoughtful adjustments to reduce hazards and improve mobility. Falls are one of the most common causes of injury among seniors, but many of the risks can be significantly reduced with careful planning. Here are practical ways to trip- and fall-proof a home and help your loved ones maintain independence and confidence.

## 1. Start With a Clear, Uncluttered Pathway

One of the simplest yet most effective steps is removing everyday clutter. Shoes, loose papers, small décor items, and stacks of magazines can create dangerous obstacles. Aim for wide, clear walking paths through all main areas, especially hallways and the route between the bedroom and bathroom. If the home has pets, consider using gates or designated pet areas to prevent unexpected obstacles underfoot.



## 2. Secure or Remove Loose Rugs

Rugs may be decorative, but they can easily slide or curl at the edges, creating a major tripping hazard. If rugs must stay, use non-slip backing or rug-gripping pads to keep them firmly in place. High-pile, thick, or fringed rugs are especially risky and should be removed when possible.

## 3. Improve Lighting Throughout the Home

Many falls occur simply because an older adult couldn't see an obstacle clearly. Bright, consistent lighting can greatly improve safety. Replace dim bulbs with brighter LEDs, add night-lights in hallways and bathrooms, and consider motion-activated lights for convenience. Pay special attention to stairways, entryways, and transition areas between rooms, where shadows tend to create hidden risks.

## 4. Reorganize Frequently Used Items

Reaching for objects on high shelves or bending low for heavy items increases the risk of imbalance. Rearrange cabinets, closets, and kitchen areas so that everyday items—medications, dishes, cleaning supplies, clothing—are at an easy-to-reach height. This reduces unnecessary stretching and makes daily living more manageable.

## 5. Add Supportive Handrails and Grab Bars

Handrails and grab bars provide stability where balance is most often challenged. Install sturdy handrails on both sides of staircases and consider adding grab bars in bathrooms, especially near toilets

and inside showers or tubs. These simple additions help prevent slips on wet surfaces and provide steady support when standing up or moving around.

## 6. Make Bathroom Safety a Priority

Bathrooms are common fall zones due to moisture and hard surfaces. Non-slip mats inside and outside the tub, raised toilet seats, and shower chairs can make a significant difference. Ensure towel racks are not used as substitute grab bars—only safety-rated equipment should support weight.

## 7. Check Furniture Layout and Height

Furniture that is too low, too soft, or oddly positioned can make sitting and standing difficult. Arrange seating so there is enough room to move easily, and choose chairs with firm cushions and stable armrests. Avoid furniture with sharp corners or unstable legs.

## 8. Ensure Proper Footwear Indoors

Encourage the use of supportive, non-slip shoes indoors instead of slippers or socks. This simple change greatly improves traction on smooth flooring.

An advertisement for KANDU In-Home Support. It features three women: an elderly woman smiling, a younger woman smiling, and a woman in a white uniform. The text "KANDU IN-HOME SUPPORT" is prominently displayed in large blue letters, with "Because there's no place like home." in a smaller blue font below it. The KANDU logo is in the top left corner.

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An advertisement for Hillcrest Apartments. It features a photo of an elderly couple sitting on a couch. The text "Hillcrest Apartments" is in large, bold, black letters. Below it is the address "2200 Burton Street - Beloit" and the phone number "608-363-9246". The text "A fun community with many amenities!" is at the bottom, along with a small icon of a house with a wheelchair accessibility symbol.

# What to Do After Visiting Elderly Loved Ones for the Holidays and Realizing Changes Are Needed

By Shelley Krupa, Business Operations Coordinator at Jefferson Memory Care

Post-holidays are a common time for the feelings of concerns about a loved one and their safety to pop up to keep you and your family wondering, "What are the next steps if this happens to Nana?" It's an opportune time to look for the options and start your planning before it's too late. May your family's story be like this wise granddaughter who recognized signs in time to help her grandmother.



I didn't expect the moment to hit me as hard as it did. It was the day after Christmas, and I was helping my grandmother put away leftovers. She moved slowly—much slower than last year—and at one point, she reached for a dish on the counter and lost her balance just enough for my heart to stop. She caught herself, brushed it off with a laugh, and insisted she was "just a little tired." But I knew. That tiny wobble felt like a flashing red light. During that visit, I saw what I had, during previous visits, been too busy to notice: bills stacked on the table, expired food in the fridge, and a loneliness that hung in the air heavier than I remembered.

Driving home, I realized change wasn't optional anymore—it was necessary. And like so many families after the holidays, I found myself wondering what steps to take next.

The first step is acknowledging what you observed, even if it feels uncomfortable. In my case, I listed everything from mobility concerns to signs of forgetfulness. Writing these observations down helped me separate emotion from facts. It also prepared me for conversations with family members who hadn't been there to see what I saw.

Next, I scheduled a health checkup for my grandmother, framing it as a routine visit rather than a reaction to worry. Many aging adults resist the idea that anything is changing, so approaching this gently matters. A doctor's evaluation can uncover issues families aren't trained to notice—early cognitive decline, medication mismanagement, hearing or vision changes, or fall risks. That appointment became one of the most important steps we took because it gave us clarity.

I also realized how risky her home environment had become, which led to the third step: making practical safety modifications. In her story, that meant installing grab bars, adding brighter lighting, and clearing cluttered pathways. For other families, it may mean reviewing smoke detectors, removing throw rugs, or setting up a medical alert system. These simple adjustments can drastically reduce the chances of an accident.

Another issue that became obvious was the growing isolation she felt. So the next step was building a support network. I reached out to neighbors, church members, and a local senior program to create a circle of connection. Whether it's arranging weekly visits, hiring part-time help, or setting up meal deliveries, consistent social engagement and support can transform both safety and emotional well-being.

Finally, I learned the importance of initiating compassionate conversations. Instead of telling my grandmother what had to change, I shared what I felt during that moment in the kitchen. I told her I wanted her to stay independent for as long as possible—and that taking a few steps together could make that happen. When older loved ones feel included rather than managed, they're much more open to accepting help.

The holidays reveal what everyday routine hides. If you left your visit feeling uneasy, trust that instinct. Use what you saw as the starting point for action, support, and meaningful change that keeps your loved one safe while preserving their dignity.

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# A Matter of Trust

By Ken Anderson, [themayberryguru@gmail.com](mailto:themayberryguru@gmail.com)

In one of the later episodes of The Andy Griffith Show, Andy faced a difficult decision. Opie needed surgery to remove his tonsils. The problem was that a new doctor had arrived in town, and the good people of Mayberry did not trust him. He was young, talked funny, drove a sports car, and played golf. Not quite the attributes one looks for in a doctor, especially a doctor who would do surgery on your son. Andy would need to trust this new, unproven doctor.

Trust is crucial in life. There are so many people whom we need to trust throughout our lives. And many of them are total strangers. Every time we board an airplane, we are entrusting our lives to strangers. There is a stranger in the control tower. Strangers inspect the plane before takeoff. And there is the pilot. All the people that we do not know. Yet, we entrust our lives to them, hoping they do their jobs well.

Then there is the medical aspect of our lives. Each time we have a prescription filled, we trust the pharmacist or technician to fill it correctly. One mistake could be a matter of life or death. Several years ago, I picked up a prescription. The pharmacist asked me about my serious heart condition. I told him I had no heart



condition, and he then informed me that the medication prescribed was for a serious heart ailment. He immediately contacted my doctor and discovered that a mistake had been made when sending the order to the pharmacy.

Airline pilots, air traffic controllers, doctors, pharmacists, or lab technicians cannot make mistakes. Too many lives depend on their

performance. One mistake could be catastrophic. Every day, millions of parents entrust the safety of their children to school bus drivers, teachers, day care providers, and countless others.

Trust is an integral part of life. Without trust, we would do nothing. On the back of all our money, we find the words "In God We Trust". These words were added to our coins during the Civil War to express the nation's reliance on divine support. It was later added to all paper money.

Imagine a soldier going into battle without trusting his commanding officer or fellow soldier. Or a paratrooper jumping out of an airplane, not trusting his parachute to open. We place our trust in God for many things in our lives, but we also need to trust our fellow man. Trust me on this.

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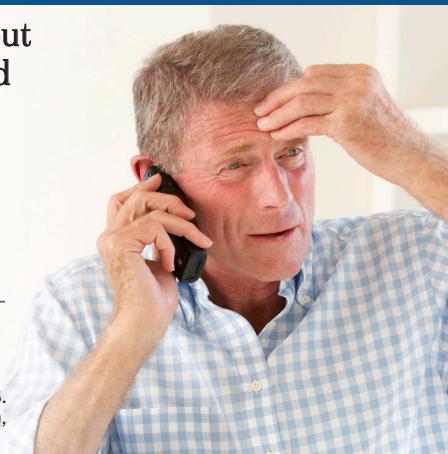
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# Coping with Caregiving

By the Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources Legal Services Team

If you're one of the more than 1 million caregivers in Wisconsin providing support to a loved one, you know the challenges that exist. Caregiver stress can put your own health at risk, jeopardizing both you and your family members. Your ADRC can help provide information and resources to manage caregiving and perhaps reduce some of the responsibilities you have.

Caring for someone with Alzheimer's or another form of dementia can be especially trying. The emotional ups and downs associated with moments of clarity and confusion take a toll. You can take a caregiver stress check at <https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/caregiver-health/caregiver-stress> to see what your stress level is. Some tips from Alzheimer's

Association include accepting changes as they occur, keeping current with your doctor's appointments, being realistic about what you can manage, and making legal and financial plans.

Another form of caregiving increasing in frequency is grandfamilies, where a grandparent is the primary caregiver of a grandchild. In Wisconsin, more than 20,000 grandparents are responsible for their grandchildren. This

provides its own set of challenges, from income and nutrition to health care and education. Legal issues also come into play, such as whether someone will be adopting, setting up a guardianship, fostering, or pursuing some other form of custodial agreement for caring for the grandchild.

## Take Care of Yourself as a Caregiver



Activities like these can lower your stress, boost your mood, and help make you a better caregiver, too.

Learn more about caregiving at [www.nia.nih.gov/caregiving](http://www.nia.nih.gov/caregiving).



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# An After the Holidays Checkup Insights into Walking the Life-long Path of Aging – Well!

By Carl A. Trapani, MA, MS, LPC, Chippewa Manor Campus Chaplain

There's something about holiday visits that shines a brighter light on life than the twinkling bulbs on the tree ever could. Maybe it's seeing Mom shuffle a little slower than last year. Maybe it's noticing Dad's hearing isn't what it used to be. Or maybe—just maybe—it's the moment you caught yourself grunting when you stood up from the couch and thought, "Wait... when did that start happening?"

After checking in on mom and dad - we realize we need a little checking on, too. If you came home from the holidays concerned about your older loved ones—and quietly aware of your own changes—you're in good company. You're part of a special generation walking a very particular road: independent, wise, still in charge... but close enough to the next chapter to feel a gentle nudge of the reality of things to come.

Noticing the changes in others helps us notice the changes in ourselves. Watching someone older struggle with everyday tasks can stir something deep inside. It's not fear—it's recognition. A quiet understanding that aging isn't something happening "over there" to someone else. It's a journey we're all walking, step by step, sometimes gracefully... sometimes creakingly. When you see someone older struggle with the losses of aging, it makes you more aware of your own life journey. When you watch your 90-year-old mother struggle trying to change a burnt-out lightbulb, you're reminded of how many lights are burnt out at your house. How much heavier the groceries seem when you carry them in from the car. And how much longer and steeper your stairs have become. Suddenly, it hits you: Aging isn't a distant idea anymore. It's relatable. Aging is shared. It connects you. It teaches you. It softens you. And sometimes... it gives you a glimpse of what help YOU may want later—and what help you definitely don't.

Seeing our elders need more help shouldn't make us anxious—it can awaken a soft awareness: "If this is coming my way someday, how do I want it to look? Who do I want around me? What small adjustments could I make now so that my future self feels supported?" There's a bittersweet beauty in that clarity. It's the heart's way of preparing us gently.

It's okay to admit that you're doing the best you can... with the knees you currently have. Some people expect AARP age seniors to swoop in and care for their older parents like professional superheroes. But guess what? Your super-hero cape is in the wash.



And it's been there for three years. Helping your elders while also managing your own aging is a balancing act—and you are allowed to lose your balance sometimes. (Just not literally. Please hold the handrail.)

Let's be honest: humor is our most underestimated survival skill. If we didn't laugh through the holiday chaos, we might cry... and crying fogs up the glasses...making it even harder to see.

There's humor in watching Dad insist he's "still steady on his feet" while using every piece of furniture as a handrail. There's love in convincing Grandma that the grab bar you installed is actually a "spa feature." There's comfort in realizing that half the things you're recommending for them...might not be a bad idea for you either. Humor doesn't hide aging—it softens it. It connects us. It turns tender moments into shared memories instead of private worries.

Small adjustments aren't admissions of weakness—they're acts of wisdom. As we help our older relatives with brighter lighting, sturdier rugs, or simpler devices, something interesting happens: We start to appreciate those same things for ourselves. Maybe that reading lamp you bought Mom looks pretty appealing at your house too. Maybe that medication organizer wouldn't be the worst idea. Maybe there's no shame at all in adding a grab bar before you "need" one. Taking small steps to make life easier is not giving in. It's giving care—both outwardly and inwardly.

The real goal isn't fixing everything—it's staying connected. If you left your holiday visit feeling a little sentimental, a little protective, and a little aware of your own aches and changes—that doesn't mean life is slipping away. It means your heart is open.

Showing up matters. Listening matters. Checking in matters. And laughter—especially laughter—matters more than any safety device on the market. You don't have to solve aging. You just have to walk alongside the people you love, even if you all walk a bit slower these days.

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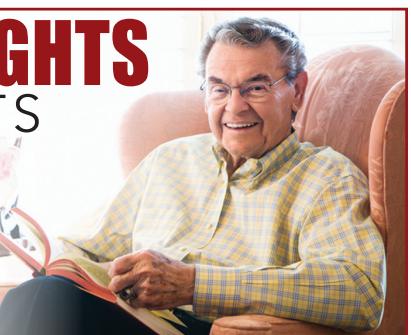
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# Did Your Holiday Visit Reveal It's Time for a Change?

Small signs can mean big risks for aging loved ones. If your visit revealed slowed steps, forgotten tasks, or new worries... you're not alone. Don't wait for an accident to happen. Now is the time to make their home safer and their life easier.

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