

Ready



Hands Inc.

Home Companion and Personal Assistance Services

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News for Clients and Friends

To Our Clients and Friends...

We recently celebrated our national independence on July Fourth. The theme of this newsletter issue is also independence, but of a different kind: the ability to live at home and to manage one's personal needs and affairs.

Independence of this kind is best thought of as a continuum. At one extreme is full freedom to do everything for oneself without help. At the other is complete dependence on others.

Many factors can impair independence. Some are beyond one's control, but

others are very much within one's control. In this issue we cover three important topics that can have a great impact on one's level of independence: exercise, socialization and transportation. We hope readers find it of interest.

It is a continuing pleasure and privilege to participate in the care of so many wonderful clients and families. Thank you for this rewarding opportunity that you have given us!

Best wishes to all,

—Sue and Granger Benson

Exercise for Independence

We all want to live as independently as we can. One of the most important strategies for preserving our ability to take care of ourselves as long as possible is regular exercise. Studies show that physical inactivity leads to a more rapid decline in functional capabilities among seniors, and thus can threaten independence.

Exercise is beneficial for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, osteoarthritis, osteoporosis, obesity, depression, balance problems and many other disorders. Exercise improves one's mental attitude, self-esteem and general sense of well-being. Data also show definite improvement in mental function among individuals who engage in regular activities like walking.

The main components in an exercise program are as follows:

⇒ **Endurance activity.** The best example is walking performed for a total of 30 minutes on most days of the week. Three 10-minute sessions during the day are acceptable. Exert yourself enough so that your breathing increases moderately. Don't overdo it, but if you can talk during exercise with no trouble at all, you're probably not exerting yourself enough.

⇒ **Muscle strengthening** is next. We all lose muscle mass and strength as we age. Some simple everyday activities can build strength in certain muscles. Examples are walking up steps, yard work and household chores. However, most people can benefit

from group classes in which specific safe exercises are used and taught.

⇒ **Balance exercises** like standing on one foot, walking heel-to-toe and arising from a chair without using your arms help to improve gait stability. Many exercise classes, including Tai Chi, incorporate activities to improve balance.

⇒ **Gentle stretching** is the final component. Stretching is important for staying limber and preventing muscle injury.

Check with a doctor about what kinds of exercise are safe and appropriate for you, especially if just starting. However almost everyone can benefit from some kind of exercise. Chair exercise classes are good for those with impaired walking. Pool exercises can help people with severe arthritis. The important thing is to do what you can, and stick with it.



Friends, Group Activities Keep Us Going



Consider the situations of two hypothetical people, each living alone. Assume they have approximately equal limitations due to arthritis and impaired vision. Both have had to give up driving. One of them, Social Butterfly, has an active network of friends, participates in activities at the local senior center and has a family member take her to church, shopping and occasional outings. The other, Home Body, gets out of the house infrequently, has few friends and seldom participates in group activities. Which one is likeliest to experience a greater decline in functional capabilities over time?

Most of us would agree that Home Body is likely to lose the ability to function independently more quickly than Social Butterfly. We generally associate being socially involved with a higher level of vitality. In fact, extensive research bears this out.

Studies show that those of us who stay engaged with a network of friends and who participate in group and community activities tend to experience better mental and emotional well-being. Being socially active fosters life-affirming, positive attitudes. Depression and loneliness are less common. These benefits help us live productive lives

despite what limitations we may have—in other words, they help us remain independent.

The lesson is to seek out opportunities to participate in activities with others. Some practical pointers:

- ⇒ Don't let the loss of driving ability hold you back. There are many transportation alternatives for those who don't drive. (See below for more on this topic.)
- ⇒ Choose recurring scheduled group activities and put them on your calendar. Sticking with scheduled activities is much easier than trying to come up with new ideas each week.
- ⇒ Find ways to share a hobby or an interest with others.
- ⇒ When you're with other people, adopt "host" behavior, not "guest" behavior. Show a genuine interest in others. Try to make them feel comfortable. Introduce an acquaintance to someone new.
- ⇒ Be a catalyst. If you have a friend, parent or loved one who is withdrawn or reluctant to get involved, encourage them to do so—and go along yourself. You will both benefit.

Transportation Tips for Those Who Don't Drive

For individuals with visual impairment, memory loss or other limitations, operating a vehicle may no longer be safe. What can one do when driving oneself is no longer an option? Here are some suggestions. (Note: Ready Hands personnel drive clients as part of our Home Companion services, but we do not offer transportation by itself.)

- ⇒ Have friends or family members drive you to appointments, shopping, church or social functions.
- ⇒ Hire an acquaintance or neighbor on an hourly basis.
- ⇒ Use taxis or public transportation, if available. Fairfax County publishes the brochure "A Guide to Safety on Public Transportation." Call (703) 246-3262 for copies.
- ⇒ Find out about volunteers from church or other organizations who perform driving services.

- ⇒ If necessary, arrange for some services to be provided at home which would otherwise require transportation. Examples: home delivery of groceries, hairdresser "house calls" etc.
- ⇒ Use an errand or personal transport service, such as Errands 4-U at (703) 938-3790.
- ⇒ Explore local government-sponsored services for individuals with income limitations and/or disabilities, such as: Fastran, (703) 222-9764; Metro Access, (703) 523-7009; Seniors-On-The-Go, (703) 324-1172.
- ⇒ Contact Connect-a-Ride (see box below).



Connect-A-Ride—A Valuable Resource for Seniors

Connect-A-Ride is a free transportation "help line" that links seniors with transportation resources in Fairfax and Arlington Counties and in Montgomery County, MD. Certified Information Specialists provide personalized information and referrals to volunteer agencies, private fee-for-service providers and special transportation programs. They can also help plan for future transportation needs.

Connect-A-Ride also offers financial assistance for a limited number of taxicab rides for those who meet income eligibility criteria.

Telephone: (703) 323-6494, M-F, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.