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Aging in Place and Aging in Community

Living at home may be possible, but requires thoughtful, creative planning.

If you desire to live at home as you age, or if you're trying to help your mom or dad live independently, chances are you're running into a few challenges. What should you do and where should you start to make this happen? Everyone's circumstance is different, but there are common situations that most people face. Here are some strategies for dealing with them and some exciting housing options to consider.

ADLs and Prioritizing Safety

"Safety is the most important," says geriatric psychologist Linda Ercoli, PhD, UCLA Semel Institute of Neuroscience and Human Behavior. "Also consider if the individual has the mental and physical capabilities of living a safe life and a quality life."

Activities of daily living, or ADLs, is a term healthcare providers use to describe fundamental self-care tasks. ADLs vary for each person, but some of the vital tasks are bathing, dressing, eating, functional mobility, and managing money.

Taking care of finances means paying bills on time and not falling prey to scams. If a person needs help paying bills in a timely manner, setting up auto pay for utilities and mortgages can help keep finances managed.

Unfortunately, seniors are top targets for scammers because many are believed to have lots of available cash and can be easily manipulated. Among the top 10 scams identified by the National Council on Aging are reverse mortgages and fraudulent anti-

aging schemes. To become more familiar with them, go to the website noca.org and enter the term "scams" in the upper left search box.



The choices in senior housing are expanding. Intentional communities, where people live in their own homes and share some common facilities, are on the rise.

Eating healthfully is important at every age. Some elderly people simply don't eat enough and subsist on a few simple foods, which can lead to malnutrition. If a person can't drive or shop, there are meal delivery services, such as Meals on Wheels. Area grocery stores may deliver orders, and there are online grocery delivery services as well. Still, just because the fridge is full, that does not guarantee a person is eating well.

"Loved ones need some kind of assessment," says Dr. Ercoli.

"This can be informal. Just check things out. Is the food in the fridge spoiled? Is the house in disarray? Make it a casual observation, you don't have to be militant."

Safety includes the ability to take care of one's home and self. That includes the ability to do laundry (or having it done), and the awareness to wear clean clothes. The home should be kept in good working order, the furnace and air conditioner functional, and the home's interior and exterior maintained.

Because falls can be more common as a person gets older, it's wise to also assess the home for fall risk. Get rid of anything that is a tripping hazard, such as throw rugs and clutter in the pathways. Make use of night lights and ensure there is good lighting throughout the home. Any rails, such as on

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Jonathan Wanagat, MD, PhD
UCLA Division of Geriatrics

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customer service representative.**Risk Factors for Stroke on the Rise**

Researchers have found a significant increase in the percentage of people with stroke who have high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking, and other risk factors for stroke. According to study author Fadar Oliver Otite, MD, University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, an estimated 80 percent of all first strokes are due to risk factors that can be changed, such as high blood pressure, and many efforts have been made to prevent, screen for and treat these risk factors. “Yet we saw a widespread increase in the number of stroke patients with one or more risk factors,” says Dr. Otite. “These alarming findings support the call for further action to develop more effective methods to prevent and control these risk factors to reduce stroke risk.” For the study, researchers examined a public database of U.S. hospitalizations, and identified 922,451 adult hospitalizations for ischemic stroke between 2004 and 2014. An ischemic stroke is caused by a blockage in a blood vessel, such as a blood clot. Of those stroke cases, 93 percent of people had one or more risk factors, which increased from 88 percent in 2004 to 95 percent in 2014. The prevalence of high cholesterol more than doubled during the study period, from 29 percent to 59 percent; diabetes increased from 31 percent to 38 percent and high blood pressure increased from 73 percent to 84 percent. And the prevalence of drug abuse doubled, from 1.4 percent to 2.8 percent. Dr. Otite says that while we have made great strides in reducing the proportion of people who die from stroke, we still have progress to make on preventing stroke and better controlling these risk factors. The study appeared in the Oct. 11, 2017, online issue of *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology.

New Shingles Vaccine Recommendations

The FDA has approved a new shingles vaccine, Shingrix, that the CDC says is better than a zoster vaccine (such as Zostavax), the vaccine that has been in use for 10 years. Shingrix is recommended for people age 50 and older and in some cases for those who previously received a zoster vaccine. Shingles is caused by the reactivation of the varicella zoster virus (VZV), the same virus that causes chickenpox. Nearly all older adults have the VZV dormant in their nervous system. As people age, the ability of the immune system to resist reactivation of VZV decreases. Shingles typically presents as a painful, itchy rash that develops on one side of the body and can last for two to four weeks. The pain associated with shingles is often described as burning, shooting or stabbing. Even once the rash is gone, a person can experience postherpetic neuralgia (PHN). This pain lasts at least three months and may persist for several years. PHN is the most common complication of shingles, occurring in 10 to 18 percent of all shingles cases. There are an estimated 1 million cases of shingles in the United States each year. One in three Americans will develop shingles in their lifetime. The risk increases to one in two for adults aged 85 years and older. Shingrix has been found to be about 90 percent effective across all age groups. That is higher than Zostavax, which is about 60 percent effective in people in their 60s and only 40 percent effective in people over age 70. However, temporary side effects (fever, muscle pain) are reportedly higher with Shingrix.

DASH Diet Ranked as Best Diet Overall

For the eighth consecutive year, *U.S. News and World Report* ranked the National Institutes of Health-developed DASH Diet “best overall” diet among the nearly 40 it reviewed. The announcement came just as new research suggests that combining DASH, or Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension, with a low-sodium diet has the potential to lower blood pressure as well as or better than many anti-hypertension medications. With its focus on vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and lean proteins, DASH tied this year for “best overall” diet and was ranked No. 1 in the “healthy eating” and “heart disease prevention” categories. Previous research has shown that people who follow the DASH diet may be able to quickly reduce their blood pressure by a few points in as little as just two weeks. Over time, their systolic blood pressure (the top number in a blood pressure reading) could drop by eight to 14 points, which significantly reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease. ■

Take a Daily Walk for Better Brain Health

This simple act can improve attention and information-processing speed.

It's an activity that most anyone can do, and it doesn't matter where you do it—a treadmill, a seashore, a mall, or city street. Walking does your body and your brain good. But how far and for how long should you walk to experience better brain health? It doesn't take much, according to recent research from UCLA (funded in part by the National Institutes of Health). Walking more than 4,000 steps a day can improve attention and mental skills in adults 60 and older. That's just a couple of miles, or depending on your pace, less than 45 minutes per day.

Walking Affects Brain Thickness

The recent UCLA research adds to an ever-growing body of evidence that physical activity is important in preventing cognitive decline and dementia in older adults. Brain volume and brain thickness, both measured by neuroimaging methods, are different ways of quantifying the health of the brain. Previous research has shown that physical activity correlates with higher volume in the hippocampus, a small, memory-critical region deep within the brain. The UCLA study unveils another important way exercise contributes to brain health.

"Few studies have looked at how physical activity affects the thickness of brain structures," says Prabha Sridharth, PhD, the study's first author and a biostatistician at the Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior at UCLA. "Brain thickness, a more sensitive measure than volume, can track subtle changes in the brain earlier than volume and can independently predict cognition."

Researchers recruited 29 people age 60 and older with memory com-



Walking with friends can help you stay motivated.

plaints. During the two-year study, researchers tracked their physical activity for seven days using accelerometers (step counters), and determined their average number of steps per day. Study participants were divided into one of two groups: those who walked more than 4,000 steps a day and those who walked fewer steps. The participants underwent a number of neuropsychological tests and MRI scanning.

Researchers found that participants who walked more than 4,000 steps each day had a thicker hippocampus and thicker surrounding regions than those who walked less than 4,000 steps. Thickness in these regions correlates with better cognitive function. The more active group also had superior performance in attention and information-processing speed and executive functioning, a set of mental skills that allows people

to make plans and achieve goals.

Lower physical activity correlated with thinner brain structures and lower cognitive functioning. The researchers said future studies will track participants over a longer period to better understand the causes of a thinning hippocampus.

Starting a Walking Program

Step counters are a great way to track daily steps and measure your overall progress. They can also be very motivational—urging you take just a few more steps to accomplish your daily goal. These devices, also known as pedometers and accelerometers, can be simple clip-on devices available for less than \$20. Fitness trackers, such as those worn like a wristwatch, offer many more features. For example, they may track exercise duration, intensity, heart rate, and mileage. Options may include viewing and filtering stored data online to track progress over time and joining competitions. A simple pedometer can be just as effective, as you can easily log your own steps in a notebook.

To start, get a baseline by tracking steps on your first day. Walking at 3.5 mile per hour pace is considered brisk. Wear sturdy walking shoes and comfortable loose clothing. Enlist a friend, a loved one or a spouse to join you on your daily walks. Having a buddy helps you both stay motivated and socially connected, too.

Walking for Life

Make friends and create a sustained walking program by joining a club or signing up for a fundraiser. The American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, and the Arthritis Foundation are just a few of the major health nonprofits that have fundraising walks. You can find walking clubs at the website Meetup.com, local YMCAs, senior centers, and the American Volkssports Association (ava.org). Volkssporting started in Germany as a personal sports program offering non-competitive walks. A U. S. club was established in 1976 and now has hundreds of clubs nationwide. ■

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

- **Step** trackers can improve motivation.
- **Joining** clubs helps you stick with a walking program.
- **Walking** at a 3.5-mile-per-hour pace is considered brisk.

Delightfully Delicious Leafy Greens

Spring is the perfect time to add more gorgeous greens to your meals.

Springtime farmer's markets are bursting with leafy greens. These nutritional powerhouses provide you with plenty of fun opportunities to add fresh flavors to your dishes. Think peppery arugula, lush colorful kale, and spicy mustard greens.

"The darker the green, and often the more bitter, the more antioxidants and phytonutrients are contained within the plant," explains registered dietitian Dana Hunnes, UCLA Medical Center. "I love to use arugula and kale as the base to my salads because they are a very hardy salad green, which on its own can stand up to many strong flavors, or be the flavor of the salad itself."

Inside Leafy Greens

Phytonutrients are natural chemical compounds that trigger a health-promoting cascade of cellular events. In whole foods, phytonutrients produce a synergistic effect greater than any effect a supplement can provide. That's why nutrition experts advocate for eating whole, fresh foods instead of simply taking supplements. Leafy greens are generally eaten whole, often raw, and are bursting with flavor, especially when freshly picked from nearby farms or from your own back yard.

Below are just three of the many reasons why you should consider adding more of them into your meals.

➔ **Folate is an essential B vitamin for heart and mind.** Leafy greens supply an abundant amount of folate, a B vitamin. Folate (also known as vitamin B9 or folic acid) is well-known as a vital vitamin during pregnancy, as it reduces the risk of birth defects. But, it's essential for older adults, too. A large study reported that patients over age 55 with vascular disease reduced their risk of stroke by taking folate. Low folate status has also been linked



Enjoy lightly sautéed kale sprinkled with cranberries and pine nuts.

to depression and poor response to antidepressants.

➔ **Longer telomeres may slow the pace of aging.** Another important biochemical action of folate is its role in DNA duplication and repair. At the ends of chromosomes are strands of DNA called telomeres. Just like longer plastic caps at the end of shoelaces protect the laces from fraying, longer telomeres help protect cells from degrading. While the shortening of telomeres is a natural part of aging, lifestyle choices, including dietary ones, influence how quickly or slowly this process occurs. Smoking and stress expedite telomere shortening, whereas eating healthy foods, including leafy greens, can help reduce the rate of telomere shortening, and thus may slow the pace of aging.

➔ **Vitamin K plays a positive role in blood, bone, and digestive health.** This vitamin is abundant in leafy greens and plays a powerful role in blood clotting. People on blood thinners, such as warfarin, are advised to keep their vitamin K intakes stable. Recent research has shown that vitamin K is also involved in bone building. Study participants with low levels of circulating vitamin K have been found

to have low bone density. One study showed that women who ate a serving of leafy greens daily cut their risk of hip fracture in half. The fiber in greens is also excellent for the digestive system—helping things to move along and out of the body.

Growing and Getting Local Greens

By April the soil is warm enough to start sowing seeds and transplanting small plants into outdoor gardens or containers. Harvesting your own plants provides you with peak flavor and freshness. Kale, lettuces, parsley, spinach, and many herbs are fairly easy to grow. Having them handy may motivate you to eat more of them, and get cooking, too. Fresh herbs on an omelet or tossed into pasta transform simple dishes into extraordinary ones. For inspiration on what to grow, seek out your local university. Most have extension partnerships between state, federal and county governments to provide knowledge and expertise, free of charge, to the public. The National Institute of Food and Agriculture supports both universities and local offices of the Cooperative Extension System (CES), where you can get advice about what grows best and when in the soil of your area.

You might also consider buying into community-supported agriculture (CSA) boxes. They are available in most areas nationwide. CSA members usually purchase weekly shares of seasonal, local produce. Most CSA have a calendar of what's expected during a typical harvest month. Still, each box is a wonderful surprise of produce picked at their peak of flavor.

CSA boxes are a delicious way to inspire your culinary spirit and support local farmers, too. A box either arrives at your home or you pick it up nearby. Some CSAs, such as South Central Farmers in the LA area (scfcoop.southcentralfarmers.com), allow one-time purchases. ■

Keep leafy greens cool by refrigerating at 35-40 degrees. Just before use, wash all greens thoroughly under running water. Blot greens with a paper towel, or use a salad spinner to extract excess water. Use within one week.

Qi Gong Stimulates Healing Energy from Within

This slow, gentle ancient Chinese modality helps cancer patients feel better in body, mind, and spirit.

Energy. Chi. Life force. Holy spirit. There are many names for the invisible essence that flows through all of life. What if you could harness this natural energy to heal the body, mind, and spirit? According to traditional Chinese medicine, you can.

Grand Master Tang Wei Zhong has been a martial arts teacher for over 30 years and has taught qi gong as a healing technique for more than 20 years. Assisted by Michael Sieverts, who has studied qi gong for many years, and who is a cancer survivor, they teach qi gong classes through the Simms/Mann UCLA Center for Integrative Oncology. The classes are free of charge to cancer patients and their caregivers.

“Any exercise, but qi gong especially, increases the circulation of your blood and qi,” explains Master Tang. “When you exercise, a feeling comes out that helps you, but you shouldn’t exercise to the point of depletion.”

Healing Through Slowness

Qi gong (pronounced Chee Kung) is part of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). Often described as moving meditation, this ancient Chinese modality is said to stimulate the immune system through deep breathing and slow, flowing movement. There are thousands of styles and adaptations, which include the many versions of tai chi. All are fundamentally based on the idea of harnessing existing natural energy to self-heal.

This ancient way of healing through movement is quite different from Western modes of exercise in several ways. Qi gong asks for a relaxed mind and body while practicing movements very slowly.

“Slow works for everyone—strong

weak, sick, well, male, female, young, old,” explains Master Tang. “When

you move slowly you can feel in detail what’s going on with your body and can feel connected with your environment. When you inhale, can you feel the cold air coming in through the top of your head, and when you exhale, can you feel the warmth in the center of your palms? You can only feel these things when you’re moving slowly.”

Depression, Inflammation, Insomnia

Researchers from the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center have reported that qi gong reduces depressive symptoms and improves quality of life in women undergoing radiation treatments for breast cancer.

Their study, published in the journal *Cancer*, examined the effects of qi gong in patients actively receiving radiation therapy and included a follow-up period to assess benefits over time. Researchers were particularly interested to see if qi gong would benefit patients experiencing depressive symptoms at the start of treatment. Managing stress is important for cancer patients because stress can negatively affect the healing process. Stress can trigger inflammation, which impairs the immune response.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

When looking for a class, observe the spirit of it:

- **Do** you get a feeling of compassion and connection?
- **Do** students take the practice seriously?
- **Is** this instruction clear?
- **What** does your intuition say?



The slow movements of qi gong help relax and refresh body and mind.

Enrolled in the trial were 96 women with stage 1-3 breast cancer from Fudan University Shanghai Cancer Center in Shanghai, China. Forty-nine patients were randomized to a qi gong group consisting of five 40-minute classes each week during their five-to-six-week course of radiation therapy, while 47 women received the standard of care. The program incorporated a modified version of qi gong, consisting of synchronizing one’s breath with various exercises.

Participants in both groups completed assessments at the beginning, middle, and end of radiation therapy and then one and three months later. Different aspects were measured, including depressive symptoms, fatigue, sleep disturbances and overall quality of life. Benefits emerged over time.

Patients in the qi gong group reported a steady decline in depressive symptoms. No changes were noted in the control group. As the benefits of qi gong were largely observed after treatment concluded, researchers suggest qi gong may speed up the recovery process especially for women with elevated depressive symptoms at the start of radiation therapy. According to the study authors, the delayed effect could be explained by the cumulative nature of the practice, as the benefits often take time to be realized.

“If you practice qi gong right after chemotherapy, for example, you might get too tired,” says Master Tang. “If you come to class and aren’t really up to practicing, just sit and follow along in your mind.” ■

Are Postmenopausal Symptoms Disrupting Your Life?

Lasers offer a non-hormone, drug-free treatment option.

Millions of women suffer from postmenopausal symptoms such as itchy vaginal dryness, thinning vaginal walls that can cause intercourse to be painful, and mild incontinence triggered by a mere laugh or sneeze. These and other annoying issues

are collectively referred to as “genitourinary syndrome of menopause” or GSM. These symptoms have a variety of treatment options. For example, over-the-counter moisturizers can temporarily relieve dryness, but they don't restore vaginal health. Vaginal hormone creams can help quell some symptoms, but that's not a viable option for some women, such as breast cancer survivors. Also, according to female pelvic medicine specialist and reconstructive surgeon Chad Baxter, MD, UCLA Medical Center, estrogen suppositories may not work, and it can take up to six months of using them thrice weekly to know. That's a significant investment of time and money for a treatment that may not reap results.

Carbon dioxide (CO₂) lasers offer another option. This non-hormonal approach for treating GSM has been shown to rejuvenate vaginal tissue. Just a few treatments can provide up to 18 months of relief.

“Laser treatments stimulate the growth of the vaginal lining and improve moisture and elasticity,” explains Dr. Baxter. “These treatments recreate a pre-menopausal environment, repopulating the vagina with good bacteria and kicking out the bad, which can reduce urinary tract infections.”



Treatments are quick, in-office procedures.

How Lasers Heal

Deep tissue laser therapy works by what's called “photobiomodulation,” a process that repairs damaged tissue by stimulating cell renewal. Using a small instrument inserted into the vagina, thousands of particles of light

slightly pierce the vaginal tissue. As the body heals these tiny pinholes (about the size of human hair), collagen renews, blood flow improves, and the tissue becomes more elastic. In use at UCLA is a fractional CO₂ laser, which enables the physician to control the depth of laser penetration with each treatment. The deeper penetration provides relief of urinary symptoms, such as frequency, urgency, and mild stress incontinence. The typical course of treatment is three procedures spaced over 18 weeks. Most women report relief after the first session.

“The treatment is delivered by a small narrow instrument and requires just five minutes to administer,” says Dr. Baxter. “Our patients range in age from 34 to 103.”

Lasers can also be used on external vaginal tissue to treat pain from scars at the vaginal entrance from childbirth or surgery.

Data Details

A 12-week pilot study with postmenopausal women (average age 59) were assessed before and after three laser applications. All the participants reported painful sex (dyspareunia) due to vaginal atrophy, a common postmenopausal

UCLA MD WEBCHAT

View Dr. Baxter's video about treating vaginal atrophy with laser procedures:
<https://tinyurl.com/yapc17qs>

symptom. At 12-week follow-up, the laser treatments reduced sexual pain in all patients. The study appeared in the *Journal of Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Disorders*.

Results of a study published in the journal *Menopause* reported improvements that included reduced pain, itching, burning and dryness that lasted into the 12 months after treatment. Other data have shown that women experience up to 80 percent improvement in vaginal dryness that lasts up to 18 months after the three recommended treatments. With the restoration of vaginal mucosa, up to 70 percent of women experienced relief from urinary issues.

Treatment Is Currently Self Pay

Dr. Baxter says benefits last about a year, and after that women may need to be treated periodically to keep regenerating tissue. He also stresses that this is not a vagina “make-over” as it doesn't tighten the vagina or affect muscles of the pelvic floor.

However, because there is renewal and buildup of the vaginal wall, some women have reported improved libido and better orgasms. No major complications from these treatments have been reported. The most common post-treatment symptom is discomfort akin to a sunburn, which typically resolves within a day or two. While these treatments are effective for many women, the procedure is not yet covered by Medicare or other insurance. Each treatment can cost \$800–\$1,000 each, with three treatments as the recommended course for best results. Because nearly of half postmenopausal have bothersome vaginal issues that can be addressed by this therapy, Dr. Baxter expects that it will become more routine in the years ahead, especially when the price drops. ■

Housing Options—cont. from page 1

stairs, should be secure and not wobbly. Walk-in showers are safer than having to step into a tub. Either way, install grab bars in the shower/tub. Handheld showerheads and seats in the shower are also helpful.

Managing the Car Keys

No longer being able to drive is, for many people, a major loss of independence. And it's a difficult situation, especially if a person has some dementia. This again, is a very good reason to plan. Dr. Ercoli suggests that having a loved one sign a piece of paper may make the process easier when the time comes. Seeing their own signature can help convince them that they agreed to trust you with the decision.

How do you know if it's time to stop driving? If you wouldn't be in the car or allow your children to be in the car while a loved one is driving, that's a huge clue. Look at your loved one's car to see if there are any dents or scratches, and take seriously any police citations.

Planning for the Unexpected

Some forgetfulness is a normal part of aging, but people can become fearful that it's a sign of Alzheimer's. Losing things from time to time, forgetting a name occasionally or missing a monthly bill are all normal aging, according to the National Institute on Aging. It's also important to note that forgetfulness can be related to medications, emotional issues, or medical conditions. Of course, it's also possible that some mild cognitive decline or dementia is occurring. That is why planning for the future is crucial for everyone as they age.

"You don't want to be in a situation where your loved one has loss of insight and yet nobody can step in and help them because they haven't made any arrangements for this, and they are not in a place mentally now where they are willing to agree," advises Dr. Ercoli. "If they have awareness it is much easier to manage

situations, such as whether to keep living at home, having home care, or putting into place financial support, such as automatic debit to pay bills."

A healthcare power of attorney, also called a healthcare proxy in some states, is a legal document that enables loved ones to step in and help make health care decisions when a person is no longer able. For example, if someone has a stroke and can't speak for themselves, a loved one can legally help guide care. Without such documentation, it can be chaotic and go against a person's wishes. Two siblings may be at odds for what kind of care their parent should receive, for example. Also, physicians are charged with keeping a person alive, whatever it takes, if no directives are in place. Feeding tubes, ventilators, and tracheal intubation (breathing tube placed in the throat) are common life-saving and sustaining procedures that a person may or may not want, especially if the brain has been adversely affected. A health care directive defines circumstances for your care when you can't speak and allows others to follow your instructions.

Expanding Housing Options

Aging in place can also be achieved within senior communities. Many are set up to provide levels of care within a home or an apartment. For example, you may choose a maintenance-free home that includes all the safety features, and includes options like assisted living and memory care services delivered to the residence. That negates the need to move again, which can become more challenging as a person gets older. Many of these communities often focus on active living, with tennis courts, golf courses, gyms, arts and crafts, restaurants, mini markets, and transportation to area shops and sites.

Cohousing refers to communities where people have their own residences but share communal spaces, such as gardens, common rooms, and other spaces for gatherings. Some of these developments are retrofitted in

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Consider** a person's mental and physical states to determine best housing options.
- **Determine** which services may need to be brought into the home.
- **Visit** senior communities to better understand what they do and how they look.
- **Research** alternative options, such as home sharing, cohousing, and niche communities for seniors.

existing communities to make homes more senior-friendly. Others are new developments, which may be age-restricted or multigenerational. The goal in either case is the same: creating senior-friendly intentional communities where there are common facilities and shared spaces. Learn more about this concept and existing communities at cohousing.org.

House sharing is another idea to consider. Older adults desiring to stay in their home may take on a tenant or invite a family member to live with them in lieu of moving. The exchange for housing can be monetary or include a combination of caregiving, transportation, and/or home maintenance. Of course, it's wise to have the parameters of the arrangement spelled out in a lease so that all parties are in clear agreement.

The options for how to live in your senior years continue to expand. Best friends are moving in together, and niche communities for special interests and lifestyles such as arts, LGBTQ, and Buddhism are increasingly springing up. It's no longer a choice between staying at home or going to a nursing home. Rather, it can be an exciting journey into a new way to live.

Thinking about and planning for how you'd like to live in your later years is best begun sooner rather than later. And if you're helping a loved one, knowing these options exist can help ease the transition to a residence better suited to a person's physical and mental health, as well as their lifestyles and interests. ■



Editor-in-Chief
Jonathan Wanagat,
MD, PhD, Assistant
Professor, Division
of Geriatrics

Q I've been told that I need arthroscopy for an ACL tear in my knee. I'm concerned because I've heard that these procedures can actually cause arthritis. Is this true?

A Ligament injuries are the most common type of knee injuries. Unfortunately, any trauma to the joint, including surgery, can lead to cellular events in the joint that result in cartilage destruction that results in osteoarthritis (OA). But there are some important caveats to this. Left untreated, half of patients who have anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injuries develop OA within a decade or two, studies show. But, ACL reconstruction can restore knee stability, and that appears to reduce the risk of OA. So, while surgery cannot fully eliminate increased OA risk, research suggests that it is less likely to occur when a torn ACL is reconstructed versus leaving a patient with an "ACL-deficient" knee. Also know that patients who regained normal knee motion after an ACL injury were less likely to develop OA than those who lost knee motion. Depending on the severity of the injury, some ACL tears may be repaired without surgery. It does, however, require physical therapy to ensure as much return of motion as possible. They must also be kept in good working order. If the menisci (the cushioning pads of cartilage between the shin and thigh bone) are intact, fewer than 10 percent of patients have signs of arthritis 10 years after surgery. Combined injury of the knee, however, does put a patient at greater risk of OA versus those who have an isolated ACL tear.

ACL reconstruction is almost always done arthroscopically, which uses several small incisions rather than a large incision that exposes the entire knee joint. Because of this approach, recovery is less painful and faster. Physical therapy includes strengthening leg and core muscles and ensuring proper alignment of the foot, ankle, knee and hip. This same approach, along with maintaining a healthy weight and warming up before physical activities, can reduce the risk of knee problems in the future. OA is generally a slow biologic process. It can take 10 to 20 years

to reach an end state that would necessitate total knee replacement. Doing all you can to be in the best possible physical condition before and after surgery helps ensure better outcomes.

Q I feel a little intimidated asking my doctor questions. I don't always understand what I am being told. What are some reasonable questions to ask?

A Good doctors want their patients to understand what's happening with their health. If you don't ask questions, your doctor may think that you already know the answer or that you don't want any further details. Here are a few examples of what you may want to know more about. Ask if you don't know the meaning of a word (like aneurysm or hypertension) or when instructions aren't clear (for example, does taking medicine with food mean before, during, or after a meal?). Before having a medical test, ask your doctor to explain why it is important, what it will show, and what it will cost. Also ask how long it takes to get results and how you'll be notified. When you receive a diagnosis, inquire about the name of the condition and why he or she thinks you have it. Ask how it may affect you and how long it might last.

Studies show as many as 50 percent of patients either don't take their medications or don't take them correctly. Make sure you know the name of the drug and understand why it has been prescribed for you. Ask the doctor to write down how often and for how long you should take it. Make notes about any other special instructions. If you see more than one physician (most patients do), it's important for all of them to know about what you're taking. Otherwise, you may receive several medications for the same condition. Make a list of all you're taking, or simply bring the medications, supplements, or herbs to your appointment. This will ensure your doctor knows what they are, so he or she can prevent harmful drug interactions. Some patients bring a friend or family member to help them during and after a doctor's appointment. ■

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PO Box 8535
Big Sandy, TX 75755-8535
Call toll-free: 866-343-1812

EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE

Executive Editor
Healthy Years
P.O. Box 5656
Norwalk, CT 06856-5656

HealthyYears@belvoirpubs.com

We regret that we cannot answer letters or e-mails personally.

REPRINTS/WEB POSTING AVAILABLE
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