

Helping Seniors Stay Safe: Identifying Signs that Indicate Assistance in the Home is Needed

Unfortunately, in many peoples' lives there comes a time when they can no longer maintain a healthy and safe lifestyle without the assistance of outside help. And more often than not, the real issue is about the loss of independence. For seniors, believing they might lose control over some of their independence if they accept outside help is a scary proposition. This is when a loved one needs to intervene with tact and help steer the senior toward a path of accepting help that can not only provide safety, but foster independence at home as well.

The first step however, comes before finding additional care at home: the assessment and identification of signs that care is needed. At Home Solutions wants to share tips with Arizona residents and help them identify those key warning signs that a senior might be struggling. So, how do you know it's time for help? According to the Mayo Clinic, the following are key warning signs that in-home care is needed:

- ✓ **Weight loss.** Losing weight without trying could be a sign that something's wrong. For the elderly, weight loss could be related to many factors, including difficulty cooking, loss of taste or smell, or other underlying conditions such as malnutrition, dementia, or depression.
- ✓ **Personal grooming and housekeeping changes.** Failure to keep up with daily routines – such as bathing, tooth brushing, and other basic grooming – could indicate health problems such as dementia, depression, or physical impairments. Any big changes in the way things are done around the house could also provide clues to health.
- ✓ **Increased injury and safety concerns.** Take a look around the home, keeping an eye out for any red flags. Does the senior have difficulty navigating a narrow stairway? Has she fallen recently? Is she able to read directions on medication containers? Is there adequate lighting for nighttime trips to the bathroom?
- ✓ **Mood changes.** Note moods and significant differences in mood changes. Drastically different moods or outlooks could be a sign of depression or other health concerns.
- ✓ **Mobility.** Muscle weakness, joint problems and other age-related changes can make it difficult to move around as well. If the senior has become unsteady on his feet, there may be a risk of falling – a major cause of disability among seniors.

In addition to the key signs above, there are other common warning bells that might go off and things to look for in the home.

- ✓ **Hoarding.** Very little is understood about why older adults hoard; however, it is often associated with dementia. It will be obvious if the household contains large quantities of saved items like newspapers, old clothing, bags, books, mail, notes, lists – all of which have already been used and are no longer 'necessary'.

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- ✓ **Struggling to keep finances in order** - The state of an elderly person's finances is another indication that help may be needed inside the home. If mail is piling up unopened in her house, it can indicate that paying the bills and taking care of day-to-day finances is becoming overwhelming for her. Or, if she isn't handling money the way she usually does (i.e., forgetting how much cash she has, spending recklessly, gambling, etc.) she may need help.

Tasks that once seemed mundane can become unmanageable if a senior's physical or mental state is deteriorating. When approaching someone about these warning signs, keep in mind the following:

- ✓ Remember to be sensitive.
- ✓ Use motivational rather than judgmental language.
- ✓ Consider consulting a professional to conduct an assessment. Using an outside party can make it less personal and threatening.

Be sure to share concerns, encourage regular medical checkups and address safety issues. Working with a professional caregiver such as the ones provided by At Home Solutions can also help to identify important issues and assist with daily activities such as bathing, dressing, and meals as well as companionship.

For additional Web resources and information about warning signs, please visit At Home Solutions at www.athomesol.com. Contact At Home Solutions at one of our four locations: Mesa, 480-545-1170; Apache Junction, 480-984-2700; Casa Grande, 520-876-5470; or Globe, 928-425-6200, for more information on private duty care and to get a partner in care who can help provide customized options for varying client needs.

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About At Home Solutions

At Home Solutions is dedicated to improving the quality of life for seniors, disabled persons, and adults or children recovering from an illness or injury by helping them to remain in the comfort of their own home. At Home Solutions is a privately owned agency, founded by Kim McCreery in 2001. The company has four offices and provides in-home care services in Maricopa, Pinal and Gila counties. Further information can be found on the web at www.athomesol.com, or by calling one of our four locations: Mesa, 480-545-1170; Apache Junction, 480-984-2700; Casa Grande, 520-876-5470; or Globe, 928-425-6200.