

# Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU... CARING FOR OTHERS”

## Elder Abuse & Neglect

In the U.S., according to the CDC, each year, hundreds of thousands of adults over the age of 60 are abused, neglected, or financially exploited. Elder abuse, including neglect and exploitation, is experienced by 1 out of every 10 people, ages 60 and older, who live at home. This statistic is likely an underestimate because many victims are unable or afraid to disclose or report the violence.

Many elderly adults are abused in their own homes, in relatives' homes, and even in facilities responsible for their care. If you suspect that an elderly person is at risk from a neglectful or overwhelmed caregiver, or being preyed upon financially, it's important to speak up. Learn about the warning signs of elder abuse, what the risk factors are, and how you can prevent and report the problem.

Although tensions can mount in the most loving families and result in frustration and anger, an emotionally damaging or physically forceful response is *not* okay. When this happens, call for a time-out, and call for help.

You may find it difficult to imagine that the words “abuse” and “neglect” could be used to describe the way you treat the person in your care—whether he is a relative, friend, or client. Most caregivers do their best, but abuse and neglect can happen. The risk is higher when there is a history of domestic violence in the home and the senior's *own* tendency toward verbal or physical aggression. Additionally, substance

abuse can impede a caregiver's ability to provide adequate care. It also increases the risk of financial abuse as the caregiver struggles to finance a substance abuse habit.

Violence occurs at disproportionately higher rates among adults with disabilities. Also, people with dementia are especially vulnerable to mistreatment.

Understanding dementia, knowing how best to communicate with a person with dementia, and having adequate support for yourself can go a long way toward preventing abuse.

### Types of Elder Abuse

Sometimes caregivers become exhausted, and resentment starts to build, especially when caring for someone with dementia or a very difficult or abusive person. Elder abuse can take many forms:

- **Neglect**—failure to fulfill a caretaking obligation—constitutes more than half of all reported cases of elder abuse. It can be *intentional* or *unintentional*, based on factors such as ignorance or denial that an elderly person needs as much care as he or she does. This can be refusing to provide food,



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medicine and personal care, such as bathing or helping a person with toileting; over-medicating; or withholding eyeglasses, dentures or walking aids.

- **Physical violence**—Slapping, kicking or sexual abuse. Physical elder abuse is a non-accidental use of force against an elderly person that results in physical pain, injury, or impairment. Such abuse includes not only physical assaults such as hitting or shoving but the inappropriate use of drugs, restraints, or confinement.
- **Emotional abuse**—Intentionally keeping the person from friends and family; verbally attacking or demeaning him.

- **Financial abuse**—Stealing money, credit cards or property; tricking a senior into signing documents, such as wills.

If a senior's behavior changes and appears to be fearful of a caregiver or family member and you suspect elder abuse, contact the **Adult Protective Services Agency** in your county department of human services or call your local **Area Agency on Aging** for guidance. If someone you care about is in imminent danger, call 911 NOW. If your concern is for someone who lives in another state, call the elder Care locator [(800) 677-1116] for in-state help-line phone numbers. All these hotlines are free and anonymous.

## Protecting Seniors from Scams

Seniors are more likely to become the victim of exploitation and, if cognitively impaired, can be twice as vulnerable. Scammers make a special effort to lure trusting seniors; they will entice a senior with false lottery winnings, fake inheritances, illegitimate sweepstakes, or “special” opportunities to donate to their charity. The elderly have the right to be free from intimidation, harassment, and abuse.

### Be Aware, Alert

Thieves can break into a person's privacy with little more than their name off a mailbox. In many cases that's all a crook needs to find who lives in the house and even their age can be linked online. Use special caution where con artists connect with potential victims:

- ☛ By way of the phone asking for personal, credit card or social security information.
- ☛ In the postal mail offering free concert tickets or sending flyers “just for you” with special opportunities.
- ☛ The Internet offers us the convenience of email and shopping; but keep in mind, it is a predator's tool for mining unauthorized personal information.
- ☛ Door-to-door sales are still used today to steal your valuables.

## Taking Care of Yourself—Confidence-Boosting Skills

Why do some caregivers feel weighed down and hopeless when dealing with a difficult person in care, and the rare caregiver seems to be able to handle those tough situations and stay on top? According to some experts, those caregivers have certain skills that enable them to handle situations with greater ease. The skills include patience, spontaneity, self-confidence, empathy, and ability to forgive.



### Dehydration Prevention

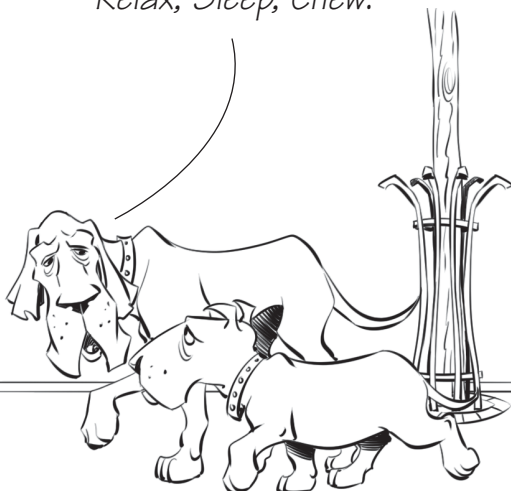
As a person ages, he feels less thirsty, so a special effort should be made to provide enough fluids. A person's fluid balance can be affected by medication, emotional stress, exercise, nourishment, general health, and the weather. Dehydration, especially in the elderly, can increase confusion and muscle weakness and cause nausea. Nausea, in turn, will prevent the person from wanting to eat, thereby causing more dehydration. Encourage the person to drink 6–8 cups of liquid every day (or an amount determined by the doctor).

### Inspiration

*We are responsible for the hurt we cause people no matter how thin-skinned we think others may be.*

### Live Life Laughing!

*It is always, Stay, Sit, Heel—never Relax, Sleep, Chew.*



### Don't Fall – Be Safe

As people age, reflexes slow, causing a fall when a senior cannot quickly regain balance following a sudden movement, such as quickly moving out of the way when something accidentally falls. Exercising to improve leg strength can help improve balance.

## Caregiving in The Comfort of Home®

### Our Purpose

To provide caregivers with critical information enabling them to do their job with confidence, pride, and competence.

### Ordering Info

From the publishers of

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The Comfort of Home®*

*Caregiver Series*

available from...

CareTrust Publications LLC

PO Box 10283, Portland, OR 97296

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## SAFETY TIPS—Health Scams

Seniors are vulnerable to health scams. Remind the person in your care to question what he sees or hears in ads or online and to ask his doctor, nurse, healthcare provider, or pharmacist about a product before he buys it. Look for red flags in ads that:

- ★ Promise a quick or painless cure for a wide range of ailments
- ★ Claim to cure a disease (such as arthritis or Alzheimer's disease) that hasn't been confirmed by medical science
- ★ Promise a no-risk, money-back guarantee
- ★ Offer an additional free gift or a larger amount of the product as a special promotion
- ★ Require advance payment and claim there is a limited supply of the product

**Federal Trade Commission Consumer Complaint Line**  
**1-877-382-4357 <http://www.ftc.gov>**

Source: <http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/beware-health-scams>

NEXT ISSUE... FALLS PREVENTION—SAFETY ON OUTINGS