

Are You Worried About A Loved-one Who Lives Alone?

By Diane Walker, RN, MS

The current 65+ generation is living at home *long* after retirement age and in record numbers. This lifestyle decision frequently impacts the lives of their children, primarily working moms with their own families. So, adults who may not understand the aging process or what to do when problems occur are becoming their parent's advocates. Many caregivers also live some distance from their parents, complicating the process even further.

If you have not seen your parents recently, use the next visit to evaluate how your loved one is doing living independently. Keep in mind adults will minimize concerns and attempt to hide problems. Here are some things to look for during the visit:

DO YOU NOTICE FORGETFULNESS OR CONFUSION? Forgetfulness and confusion are not a normal part of the aging process. If your parent is more confused, here are some things you can check to see how pervasive the issue is:

- Do they repeat themselves frequently?
- What shape is the checkbook in? Are any of the checks to people or organizations you are unfamiliar with?
- How many messages are on the answering machine?
- Do you find unpaid or delinquent bills in the desk?
- Is there nutritious food in the cupboard and refrigerator? Has it expired?
- Are their prescriptions current?
- Have they kept recent medical appointments?

HAVE YOUR PARENTS LOST WEIGHT? Weight loss can be a sign of illness and/or malnourishment. While it is normal to have less appetite as we age, a physician should evaluate weight loss.

HAS THEIR AFFECT CHANGED? Some adults develop depression and anxiety that may cause many of the signs identified above.

- Do they engage in conversation and laugh at old stories?
- Do they disengage from you? Do they go out regularly to visit friends or attend church?
- Do they appear clean and dress like they always did?
- Are they tearful or more agitated?
- Are they drinking more alcohol?

ARE THEY UNSTABLE ON THEIR FEET?

- Do they trip or hold onto furniture to walk? Do they report falling?
- Give them a massage or help with a bath so you can look for bruising.
- Do they need/use cane, walker, bathroom grab bars?
- Use the falls prevention brochure on the website to do a safety evaluation.

ARE THERE SAFETY CONCERNS IN THE HOME? FEMA has launched a Nat'l campaign focused on fire safety, smoking, cooking and space heaters to save elders lives.

- Are the smoke detectors working correctly? Replace all the batteries.
- Check the electrical outlets for burning and remove extension cords.
- Replace open, electrical space heaters. Place them away from furniture.
- Is the microwave oven clean? Are there burn marks? Are cooking pots burned?

For more information, *GRISWOLD SPECIAL CARE's* website has a number of helpful tools like a home safety check list and a falls prevention brochure that you can use to prevent injury and assist your loved one to remain independent at home. The site also has articles and a newsletter, *CARING TIMES*, that focus on the needs of family Caregivers. Visit www.GriswoldSpecialCare.com.