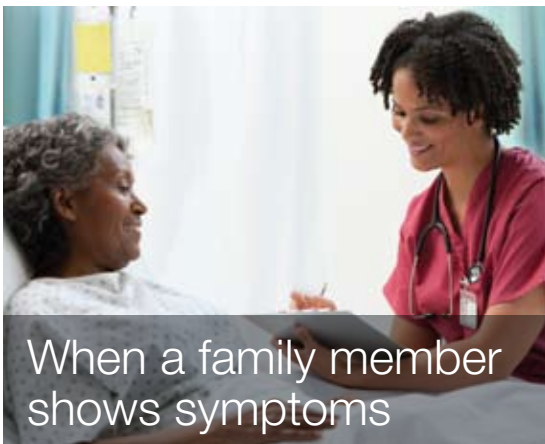


Living Long,
Living Well.

Stanford Aging Adult Services

Supporting you to stay healthy and independent.

Spring/Summer 2010



When a family member shows symptoms

- Stay with the patient if confusion is severe, particularly at night.
- Speak in calm, reassuring tones.
- Explain where the patient is and why she or he is at the hospital.
- Bring in familiar objects from home (photos, blanket, bedside clock).
- Have the patient use glasses and hearing aids.
- A well-lit room and music may be beneficial.
- During the day, encourage the patient to stand and walk, but only with the medical team's permission.
- Stay in frequent communication with the nurse and medical team.

Recognizing the signs of delirium in older patients

Often, when an older adult seems very forgetful or disoriented, caregivers may assume it's just an idiosyncrasy of age, and there's nothing that can be done. But there are times when these behaviors underlie an important medical condition called delirium.

Delirium comes on quickly, marked by a sudden change in reasoning, disorganized thinking, reduced attention, or confusion. The condition can be caused by a range of health concerns: a urinary tract infection, a recent surgical procedure, a reaction to drugs, low blood pressure, dehydration, or even being bedridden for an extended period of time.

Kathleen Turner-Hubbard, MS, NP, a specialist in caring for elderly patients, is training Stanford nurses to recognize the signs of delirium and advises families who may be concerned about a loved one's mental condition. Her on-site visits are free to hospital patients as part of their medical care.



Kathleen Turner-Hubbard, MS, NP, is training hospital staff and family members to recognize the symptoms of delirium.

"We look for patients who were fine yesterday and then suddenly don't know where they are or what day it is," she says. A delirious patient can be agitated or excited; experience hallucinations, fantasies, and delusions; or become withdrawn and lethargic.

See **Delirium** on page 7



“Aging does not mean decline or illness. Normal aging does involve changes to your vision, hearing, and reflexes, so it’s important to understand why you feel the way you do. It is critical to recognize changes and to speak with your doctor about routine screening practices that can actually prevent a condition or symptoms.”

Rita Ghatak, PhD
Director, Stanford Aging Adult Services

Read, write, and do crossword puzzles; attend lectures and plays, or take courses at local colleges or community centers. Stay curious and involved, and make a commitment to lifelong learning.

Paperwork. Be sure to bring all your legal papers up to date and keep them in one place so they are easy to find. You should complete an advance health care directive, living will, and power of attorney for health and finances.

“People often don’t want to think about these things, but you want to make your own decisions about your health,” Mindigo says. “And it’s a gift to your children if you can be organized now, before anything goes wrong.”

Home safety. Because more than 60 percent of falls occur at home, both Ghatak and Mindigo stress the importance of making some simple modifications for safety:

- Get rid of all throw rugs.
- Remove clutter.
- Use bright lights.
- Install grab bars in the bathroom.
- Have your vision checked regularly.

Connections. Stay socially active and keep in touch with friends, family, neighbors, and community groups. “Develop a network of support,” says Ghatak. “Connecting with people is good for you at every level.” AAS

To learn more about health and safety measures, contact the Stanford Health Library at (650) 725-8400 or visit healthlibrary.stanford.edu.

Tips to help maintain your health and lifestyle

With more and more adults living longer, it’s important to develop preventive measures that will allow you to live long and live well. Many problems associated with aging are preventable by developing healthy lifestyle habits, say experts at Aging Adult Services at Stanford Hospital & Clinics.

Exercise. Maintain a healthy weight through diet and regular physical activity. Just 30 minutes of moderate exercise every day—a brisk walk, swimming, or even gardening—shows immense benefit. Be sure to check with your doctor before starting any exercise program.

Studies have shown that regular exercise can lower the risk of heart disease; delay onset of diabetes; improve blood pressure; reduce risk of falls and osteoporosis; and enhance brain function.

“In fact, exercise is probably one of the main variables that we know can impact cognitive vitality,” says Rita Ghatak, PhD, Director of Aging Adult Services.

Diet. Candace Mindigo, RN, Manager of Aging Adult Services, suggests taking calcium and Vitamin D supplements daily to reduce the chance of osteoporosis. Try to follow a diet with lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy. Eat three to four servings of fish a week and only one or two servings of red meat a month. Stay away from sugary

treats and processed foods, she adds.

Increasing your intake of magnesium (found in dark leafy vegetables, beans, and nuts) may help combat memory lapses associated with aging.

Cognition. As we age, it’s important to generate new “mental maps” to keep the brain agile and focused, says Ghatak. “Just as you can exercise your body to fight off the effects of physical aging, you can keep your brain strong with mental exercises.”



Candace Mindigo, RN, Manager of Stanford Aging Adult Services, says that just 30 minutes of exercise every day helps both mind and body.

Feedback and insights a big part of new hospital design

Aging adults have a huge say in planning the new Stanford Hospital. Their insights, concerns, and personal experiences are being incorporated into the design of a state-of-the-art medical center that is projected to open at the end of the decade.

Rita Ghatak, PhD, Director of Aging Adult Services, has engaged in lively discussions with Stanford's older patients to hear about areas that need to be modified or changed. She has been meeting with community groups to discuss their concerns and to let them know how the new building is being designed to meet their specific needs.

"Walking down a long hospital corridor to the patient units is difficult," she says. "Patients have been frustrated by the layout of the hospital room."

Based on this kind of feedback, changes are being put in place. All of the rooms in the new hospital will be designed for single-patient occupancy, following national guidelines for hospital construction. Single-patient rooms will resolve one of the recurring complaints Ghatak hears from aging adults: "They don't want to share a room with another patient. They want their privacy, and they prefer a quiet environment."

Patients will also benefit from easy access to specialty services, accommodations for family members, and a design that will cut back on transfers to other parts of the hospital.

Other solutions for aging adults' health-care needs already are being tested in the existing hospital, including earplugs to help patients sleep more soundly and

new monitoring devices to replace models that sounded loud alarms.

At a time when adults 65 and older are 12 percent of the U.S. population, consume one-third of health care services, and occupy one-half of physician time, the demand for special attention for aging adults is growing.

"An enormous demand for services specific to older patients is looming large

for hospitals," says Ghatak. "Working with the community is allowing us to design the new hospital around those needs and helping us to create a place focused on the health and comprehensive care of aging adults." 

To learn more about plans for the new Stanford Hospital, please visit stanfordpackard.org.



Rita Ghatak, PhD, Director of Aging Adult Services, works with older patients to incorporate their needs into the design of the new Stanford Hospital.

At Home

Lifeline

This for-fee service can summon help 24 hours a day from a neighbor, relative, or emergency service. To apply, contact Diane Churchill at (650) 723-6906.

Checking In

A free telephone service will check in on you and advise you about community health resources. To apply, contact Sue Scardina at (650) 725-9212.

Vial of Life

Prepare and consolidate your medical information at home in case of emergency with this free program. To request material, contact Mildred Kent at (650) 498-6312.

Aging Adult Services Programs

Advance Health Care Directive (650) 723-1303

Free consultation to help formulate your medical paperwork.

Caregiver Support Program (650) 725-4137

Telephone support and education program for caregivers.

Checking-In (650) 725-9212

Program of routine phone checks and help connecting to local support networks.

Chronic Disease Management (650) 725-4137

Education and classes about self-managing chronic illnesses.

Dementia Support Program (650) 725-2664

Consultations, care coordination, and support to patients and families coping with dementia.

Geriatric Health Services (650) 723-1303

Consultations, assessments, home visits, physician referrals, advocacy, coordination of services, access to community resources, and educational workshops.

Lifeline (650) 723-6906

An in-home emergency response system for older adults.

Partners in Caring (650) 725-4137

Non-medical volunteer support for the homebound.

Strong for Life (650) 725-4137

Muscle strengthening exercise program for aging adults with or without physical limitations.

Vial of Life (650) 498-6312

A medical information storage kit at home.



Jesse Cool (left) worked with Beni Velazquez to develop a new menu for Stanford Hospital & Clinics.

Help during a difficult transition

Jesse Cool is a nationally recognized Northern California chef, restaurateur, and food writer. Last fall, her mother was hospitalized at Stanford Hospital & Clinics, and Cool learned first-hand about Aging Adult Services. She shared her experience:

My mother is 89 years old. She has congestive heart failure, lymphoma, and many other age-related challenges. Despite her independent, lively spirit, she was no longer able to care for herself and needed help with the daily activities she used to be able to do on her own.

She became frustrated and unwilling to surrender to the care she needed for her well-being. Helping her make these changes was stressful, and I struggled with trying to help her find the best choices for her comfort and safety.

Through their patience and remarkable availability, Aging Adult Services was able to help my mother and me through an emotionally demanding period. They supported us both as we dealt with her medical concerns and the transition of moving her into an assisted living apartment.

Every human being deserves the respect and care Rita and her team offered my mother. I hope that when I am an old woman there is something like Aging Adult Services to help me and my children find dignity in managing that difficult part of my life. AAS

Important questions to ask

Please go through this checklist when you are coming to the hospital for a clinic appointment or when you are being discharged.

Before a Clinic Visit:

Make sure you know the location of the clinic. Stanford's clinics are in different locations.

Talk to your physician about your ongoing and future goals.

Discuss concerns that you may have and ask your physician if you need to see someone who specializes in geriatrics.

Call Guest Services at (650) 498-3333 if you anticipate needing assistance from the parking garage to the clinic.

Discharge from the Hospital:

Ask your physician about your progress and concerns. Be sure to make a list so you do not forget.

Ask your physician about any physical, occupational, nursing, or speech therapy you might need and the availability of therapists who will come to your home. Write down the days and times.

Familiarize yourself with your medications or any new prescriptions that have been added to your list. If required, ask for a pharmacy consultation before you leave the hospital.

Are you able to pick up your medications? Locate the pharmacy closest to your home.

Has your doctor suggested any assistive devices like a bath seat, grab bars, elevated toilet seat, non-skid mats, walker, wheelchair, or cane? Do you know what these devices are and how to find them? Talk to the hospital nurse case manager about whether insurance will cover the costs or whether you will need to rent or buy these items.

Do you know when your next clinic appointment is? Write down the day, time, clinic location, and clinic phone number.

Remember to collect all your belongings and all the paperwork given to you by the hospital.



Consultation for senior concerns



Yusra Hussain, MD

Older patients often need special attention, and there are times caregivers may need expert advice on how to recognize complications unique to aging adults. That's why Stanford Hospital & Clinics is launching a geriatric consult service—to help with important age-related health issues.

As a geriatrician, Yusra Hussain, MD, works closely with physicians and nursing staff, meeting face-to-face with patients and their families. Whether it's a history of falls, a reaction to medication, or a complex family dynamic, Hussain can provide a comprehensive assessment and make recommendations to prevent and manage common geriatric problems.

"There are complex care issues that are specific concerns in aging adults," says Hussain, a Clinical Instructor of Medicine and Medical Director of Stanford Aging Adult Services. "A big part of my job is to educate the staff and caregivers to anticipate what to look for so they can prevent potential setbacks."

Hussain is familiar with older patients' special needs and works closely with social workers, pharmacists, nurses, or other specialists, if needed. She also has an outpatient geriatric practice where patients can go for continuity of care or comprehensive geriatric assessments. [AAS](#)

Physicians, medical staff, or family members can arrange for an inpatient or outpatient geriatric consult by contacting Dr. Yusra Hussain at (650) 387-6777.



Dr. Mark Blumenkranz suggests annual eye exams to protect your vision.

Protect Your Eye Health

Eye doctors use a wide variety of tests and procedures to examine your eyes. An exam will usually take a half an hour or more, depending on the doctor and the number of tests required for your eyes. Dr. Mark Blumenkranz recommends seeing an eye specialist every year after age 65 to detect and track the development of cataracts or other conditions.

Common problems in the aging eye

Vision problems affect more than 6 million Americans age 40 and over, a number that is expected to almost double in the next 10 years because of an aging population. Your eye health needs to be protected by regular check-ups and by being aware of vision changes.

Though some eye conditions are an inevitable part of aging, says Mark Blumenkranz, MD, Chair of the Department of Ophthalmology, new treatments are preserving—and improving—vision for more and more people.

“The best way to maintain vision as you get older is to be proactive, which includes seeing an ophthalmologist at least yearly and to be aware of any changes in your eyesight,” says Blumenkranz.

Starting around age 40, the lens in your eye becomes less flexible, a condition called **presbyopia**. Everyone gets presbyopia, even if you’ve never had a vision problem before. Reading glasses are the most common way to improve close-up vision; if you already wear glasses, you

may want to get bifocals or progressive lenses. In some cases, special lenses can be inserted surgically to treat this eye condition.

Cataracts, another normal part of aging, involve the gradual clouding of the lens. Though painless, the darkened lens eventually obstructs light and muddies colors, making it more difficult to read, sew, or drive a car—especially at night. The only effective treatment for cataracts is surgery to replace your lens with a clear synthetic implant. Surgery restores full vision in about 95 percent of all cases.

Surgery is done on an outpatient basis, usually with local anesthesia, and most people get back to their normal activities within a day. The timing of your eye surgery is a personal decision that depends on when your vision changes affect your activities, Blumenkranz says.

Macular degeneration is another age-related condition in which the part of your eye responsible for central vision gradually deteriorates, causing blurriness or a blind spot. It affects about 25 percent

of Americans over age 75, says Blumenkranz. Though there’s no real cure, it usually progresses slowly and many people are able to do their normal activities, especially if only one eye is affected.

Studies have shown that a diet rich in zinc (found in peanuts and beef) and vitamins C and E may slow the condition’s progress. Other studies are assessing whether antioxidants like lutein (in leafy green vegetables) and omega-3 fatty acids (in fish) can lower the risk of developing macular degeneration.

Glaucoma is a common eye disease caused by abnormally high pressure inside your eye. You may not notice any vision changes until the disease is at an advanced stage, so it’s important to get your eyes examined regularly, says Blumenkranz. If caught early, glaucoma may be treated with drops, laser therapy, or surgery. ^{MS}

You can arrange for eye tests and specialized vision care at the Stanford Eye Center by calling (650) 723-6995.

It's never too late to exercise

Research has shown that being inactive as we age causes us to lose our ability to function in day-to-day activities. Inactivity is a major cause of physical and mental loss in later life. The good news is that it's never too late to begin an exercise program, no matter what your age.

Strong for Life is a community exercise program designed to improve strength, balance, and overall health in aging adults. The program targets specific muscles that are important in everyday movements such as getting out of a chair, walking, and climbing stairs.

Most people lose about 40 percent of

their muscle mass between the ages of 20 and 80, a normal condition that is accelerated without enough exercise. Muscles tend to weaken, increasing susceptibility to fragility and falls. Studies show that while thinning bones make aging adults especially vulnerable to fractures, it's the unsteadiness caused by muscle loss in the legs that leads to falls. That's why the Strong for Life program is so helpful for older adults.

Classes meet weekly and the routines vary, with a focus on strengthening the core abdominals, back, legs, and arms to improve balance and flexibility. Participants follow a 30-minute videotape, using elastic resistance bands when appropriate; a Strong for Life Coordinator and volunteer trainers help with the routine, monitor progress, and provide motivation and encouragement.

"Muscle loss can rob an aging adult of freedom and mobility, and lead to a unhealthful, sedentary lifestyle," says Candace Mindigo, RN, Manager of Aging Adult Services. "Resistance training exercises are especially effective in building up muscle strength for both men and women. The classes are also a chance to meet other people, and they're lots of fun." AAS

Strong for Life sessions are offered on an ongoing basis at senior centers throughout the mid-Peninsula. Sessions are free but many classes have a waiting list, so registration is required. To check class availability, please call (650) 725-4137.



Strong for Life participants use resistance bands to strengthen muscles and improve flexibility.

From **Delirium** on page 1

Delirium can be extremely serious and requires immediate medical attention, so call a doctor or nurse if you notice abrupt mental changes. Approximately 30 percent of hospitalized patients over age 65 develop delirium, and the number is close to 80 percent in the frail elderly. The condition usually improves once its cause is recognized and steps are taken to remedy the situation.

Despite its prevalence, delirium can often be overlooked or attributed to the patient's age, dementia, or even depres-

sion. A missed diagnosis in an older patient can lead to longer hospital stays, unnecessary medications, and increased memory problems.

Stanford Hospital launched the delirium awareness project last year to help nurses recognize the symptoms and to closely monitor the patients most at risk. Turner-Hubbard acts as a liaison and a resource for hospital staff and family members, providing professional expertise and answering questions.

"Delirium can persist, and it can affect brain function over time," Turner-Hubbard says, "which is why we want to recognize it and take action as quickly as possible. Early intervention can help prevent future problems, avoid additional complications, and keep the patient safe both in the hospital and back at home." AAS

Nurses or family members of hospital patients can request a delirium consult by contacting Kathleen Turner-Hubbard at (650) 721-6014.

Aging Adult Services

is designed to meet the needs of aging adults and their families, and provide a continuum of care with support and resources.

geriatric.stanfordhospital.com
(650) 723-1303

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A ‘big picture’ approach to care

Health care can be profoundly confusing, especially for aging adults who face particular physical, psychological, and social needs. Older patients and their families express special concerns about ongoing conditions, staying independent, coordinating appointments, and follow-up care.

“This has been the greatest demographic shift in the history of civilization. It is the era of the promise of longevity. We are living longer and we need to develop an infrastructure that will support us to live long and live well,” says Rita Ghatak, PhD, Director of Aging Adult Services. “We have responded by building a network for ongoing care that connects different services for all sorts of concerns. I call this the continuity of care.”

Founded in 2005, Aging Adult Services was designed to help people over age 65 cope with the challenges of health care and health maintenance—a goal that often is made more difficult by chronic illness, lack of social support, and the aging


process. Ghatak, a specialist in dementia management, and her team of 12 have helped more than 6,000 geriatric patients in every aspect of their health and have trained medical staff to recognize and address the concerns of older patients.

Aging adults are assisted every step of the way, from preventive measures to keep them out of the hospital to check-ins afterwards to ensure they are taking their medication properly. Some of the services are designed to help keep seniors independent through exercise and home emergency response systems. Other programs provide follow-up after emergency room visits and consultations for concerns about lifestyle, safety, and mental health. And families and caregivers can get advice and support on difficult transitions like dementia or hospice care.

“Every patient is different. They may be dealing with five or six chronic conditions, or one incident like a fall or infection,” says Ghatak. “We know the patient as an individual. We develop a long-term rela-

tionship with each person so we are able to evaluate and re-evaluate their needs.”

Continuity of care is especially important to prevent repeat visits to the hospital and to help aging adults take control of their health and well-being. Ghatak and her team work closely with primary care physicians and medical specialists to coordinate care and then provide individualized attention—some free, some for a fee—to make sure individuals understand the particulars of their health and all the steps that may be involved in their care.

“We look at the big picture. We track their progress and see where they might need help,” Ghatak says. “So much of what aging adults are going through can be avoided by better education, better awareness, and better investment in prevention. These are all steps toward best practices.” 

To learn more about Aging Adult Services, contact (650) 723-1303 or visit geriatric.stanfordhospital.com.