



Senior Sense

Grief and Loss

By Jason Victor, BA, CPS

The death of a loved one or family member is usually considered the most difficult loss. People can also experience grief after a loss of freedom to drive or a home.

We know that grief does not have a time limit, and the time someone goes through the process varies from person to person. Basically, there is no “right” way to grieve. Everybody has his or her own journey. It’s very helpful to go through grieving by talking to friends, loved ones, a professional, and other healthy outlets.

Older adults are more likely to become physically ill after experiencing a major loss. They may already have long-term physical illnesses or other conditions in which symptoms may become worse when they are grieving.

If you know someone who had a recent loss, you can help. It’s better to reach out than to do nothing. Helping a grieving person has nothing to do with “making it all better,” “taking away the pain,” and/or “fixing it.” People have to experience the pain to get through it and come out healthy. Sometimes, an ear and a shoulder are all they need.

Some suggestions to help someone through the stages of grief include prayer, breathing exercises, meditation, laughing, massage, exercise, and not isolating. It’s a good idea to get out

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and be around others, even if it’s hard. Stay away from alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs unless under the care of a physician. If you feel like you can’t cope, or if you are using alcohol or other substances to avoid the pain, get help from a friend, family member, clergy member, counselor, doctor, or support group.

Sources:

- *Curtis, Jeannette Family Psychiatry Last Updated October 23, 2009*

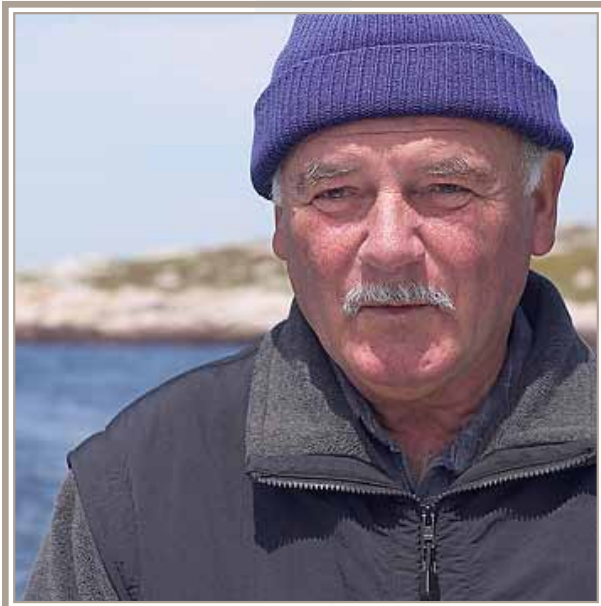


Seniors: Conquering Loneliness and Isolation

By Al-Karim Campbell, BA

You are a senior. To have achieved this distinct honor is a true testament to great decision making, enhanced coping skills, determination, healthy eating, healthy choices, a lot of love, or a combination of all. Seniors need support and love from both friends and relatives. Support sources that express appreciation are monumental to self motivation and aids in seniors avoiding loneliness.

According to senior-site.com “The elderly population is large and growing.” In 1987, 8.5 million elderly lived alone; by 2020, 13.3 million elderly will live alone. Seniors that find themselves under these circumstances must remain proactive, try to connect with a Senior Center



or a senior focused program. According to PsychCentral.com “Your local senior center often organizes classes, outings and social functions for people who want to enjoy life with other seniors.”

As a senior adult, one must make a conscious decision to get out of the house and get to know other people, it is important to establish friendships with people that nurture emotional support and will be a positive links to social communities. Remember senior life is a milestone, enjoy it — and you don't have to do so alone.

Senior Facts

- Elderly people are healthier today than they were 30 years ago. Still, seniors use the health care system more often than the rest of the population. Physical problems that result from aging are part of the reason. Other reasons are mental illness and substance use problems, especially with tobacco and alcohol.
- Seniors who are depressed are more likely to smoke. They are also three-to-four times more likely to have alcohol-related problems than those who are not depressed. Between 15 and 30 percent of people with major late-life depression have problems with alcohol.

Blood Pressure, Check... Cholesterol, Check.....Wait, and HIV?

By **Christina Vanpala, BS**

As if skyrocketing medical expenses are not already through the roof for routine care, now I have to worry about HIV?

Data from the New Jersey State HIV/AIDS Report shows that the percentage of older adults who are living with HIV/AIDS has been increasing over the years. New Jersey residents who are over the age of 49 currently living with HIV/AIDS represent 42 percent of those cases; a three percent increase from the previous year!

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, this increase is partly due to highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART), which has allowed many people who are infected to live longer. This is also due to newly diagnosed cases among older adults.

What can be done to make sure you and others are protected? Here are a few tips:

- Get tested during routine medical checks; including your partner.
- Do not use illicit drugs, over the counter or prescribed medication in conjunction with alcohol. This can be very harmful and lead to high risk behavior.
- Use a latex condom and lubricant every time you are sexually active.

Educating yourself about HIV/AIDS transmission, abstinence, and getting tested on a regular basis are ways to prevent the spread of the infection to others and to protect yourself.

Senior Facts

- There are very few prevention messages targeting older adults about HIV/AIDS. However, the risk factors for HIV infection

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are the same as in the younger population, including sexual activity, drug use, lack of knowledge, being part of a specific ethnic group and social stigma.

- Misdiagnosis can occur as HIV can mimic normal signs of aging, such as fatigue, weight loss, and mental confusion. Health professionals may not consider discussing HIV/AIDS with older patients, as they may be influenced by the stereotype that older adults do not engage in such risky behaviors.

Source:

- *New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services. (2010). New Jersey HIV/AIDS Report. Retrieved from: <http://www.state.nj.us/health/aids/documents/qtr063010.pdf>*
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- *United States Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2008). HIV/AIDS among persons aged 50 and older. Retrieved from: <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/over50/resources/factsheets/over50.htm>*
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BROWN BAG IT

By Cathy Cardew, MSW, LSW

Who knew how important a brown paper bag could be in developing a safer medication routine. According to the Merck Institute of Aging and Health, the average 75-year old has three chronic conditions and uses five prescription drugs. This does not include other over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, dietary supplements, topical treatments, etc.

To help achieve the best possible results with these medications, put all of your medication into a brown bag and bring with you to your next doctor's appointment or trip to your pharmacist. It is important that at least one health professional has a complete list of all your medications. This will greatly decrease the risk of duplication, interaction problems, inappropriate dosing, and confirm that all drugs you are taking are for the appropriate reasons. You should try to bring your brown bag of medication in at least once a year to review with your doctor or pharmacist.

Also, make a medication list with your doctor or pharmacist and always keep a copy in your wallet. This will really help when you have to give your information at other places such as a dentist's/specialist's office or in case of an emergency. It will ensure that everyone you see will have a working knowledge of your current treatment and give you the best care possible specific to your needs.

Michelle Meadows of FDA Consumer magazine, a publication of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (July-August 2006).

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