



## Caregiver's Answers, Topics, and Helpful Information

In an effort to continually assist caregivers in their search for pertinent information regarding eldercare, our Family Caregiver Support Coordinator addresses topics of most frequently asked questions via Caregiver's Answers, Topics and Helpful Information (**CATHI**). Additionally, caregivers are also invited to e-mail individual questions to the Family Caregiver Support Coordinator at [caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org](mailto:caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org).

**Dear CATHI,**

### **My brother and I are long-distance caregivers for our mother. How can we ensure our aging mother's safety in the home?**

You can't anticipate every problem, but go through the house room by room and check. Some things will need to be taken care of right away. Pay careful attention to your mom—especially her safety and overall health, and how well she manages in her home.

#### **For example:**

- If your mom is still driving, can you assess her road skills?
- How is your mom's health? Is she taking several medicines? If so, could the pills be better organized?
- What about her mood? Does your mom seem depressed or anxious?

If you feel that your mother is unsafe alone because of her health, make note of which behaviors or activities that have become most dangerous and discuss these with her primary caregiver, if there is one, and her doctor. This is one way a long-distance caregiver can be helpful. Remember, you will need your mother's permission to discuss her health with the doctor. Discuss your concerns and offer to help adapt the environment to meet your parent's changing safety needs. You can provide a fresh look when evaluating the situation. Behavior that is unsafe or unhealthy may have become familiar to the primary caregiver. Discuss your concerns and offer to help adapt the environment to meet your parent's changing safety needs. There are a variety of things you can do that will make your mom's surroundings safer, more accessible, and more comfortable. Once the urgent issues are addressed, you and your brother can start working on other ways to make sure your mom will be out of harm's way.

**These home safety suggestions can act as a starting point:**

- Are the stairs manageable, or is a ramp needed?
- Are there any tripping hazards at exterior entrances or inside the house (throw rugs, for example)?
- Are any repairs needed?
- Is the house well lit, inside and out? Do any bulbs need to be replaced?
- Is there at least one stairway handrail that extends beyond the first and last steps on each flight of stairs?
- Is there carpeting or safety grip strips on stairs?
- Is there clutter, which can cause disorientation and confusion and increase the risk of falling?
- Are all walk areas free of furniture and extension and electrical cords?
- If a walker or wheelchair is needed, can the house be modified— perhaps put in a ramp to the front door?
- Is there food in the fridge? Is any of it spoiled? Are there staple foods (such as cereal, sugar, canned soup) in the cabinets?
- Are bills being paid? Is mail piling up? It is sometimes easier to change a place than to change a person. For someone like Rhea, who is helping her mom make the house safer for her dad to live comfortably in spite of his memory problems, some steps include:
  - Talking with her mom about ways to remember to lock all doors and windows to prevent her dad from wandering.
  - Making sure all potentially harmful items, such as medications, weapons, machinery, or electrical cords are put away in a safe, preferably locked place when they're not in use.
  - Using child-resistant caps on medicine bottles, childproof latches on cabinets, and childproof plugs in unused outlets.

*The information in this article was adapted from the National Institute on Aging, Long-Distance Caregiving: twenty questions and answers, 2016.*

***\*If you would like to join our mailing list to learn more about programs and services available to you please email [caregiver2@senior-resources-quilford.org](mailto:caregiver2@senior-resources-quilford.org)***

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For referrals to community organizations in Guilford County that assist older adults and caregivers, contact Senior Resources of Guilford's SeniorLine at (336) 884-6981 in High Point, all other areas (336) 333-6981 or the Caregiver Support Coordinator, at (336) 373-4816 in Greensboro or (336) 883-3586 in High Point.

