

Caregiver Connection

Winter 2021 Newsletter



The Caregiver Connection provides information to help support family caregivers who are caring for someone with a chronic health condition or a disability. If you have questions about articles or information in the newsletter, or if you would like your name removed from this quarterly newsletter mailing list, please connect with the Caregiver Support Coordinator you have worked with:

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Fidget Activities for Loved Ones Who Are Confused or Living with Dementia by Scott Seeger, Dementia Care Specialist

When many of us hear the word fidget, we might automatically think of someone that can't sit still. In a situation where a person is confused or living with dementia, they may be bored, anxious, or nervous, and fidget activities might just be a simple, inexpensive option.



You might be asking; what is a fidget activity? Well, it is something that allows your loved one to do just that, fidget!

Fidget activities come in a variety of shapes and sizes but are designed to be safe and planned out ahead of time by the caregiver. The beauty of it all is that you may be able to create your own fidget activity for your loved one with items that you already have lying around the house and with items that they are accustomed to using.

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Let's start with a fidget blanket. These can be appropriate for both men and women, but a person with sewing skills will be needed to help you create this. To start, a roughly 30 inch by 30 inch piece of material is often chosen, but a shirt, apron, or pillow case can be just as effective. Then consider your loved ones past interests or experience. Here are some ideas that can be affixed to the blanket to keep your loved one actively and safely fidgeting: zippers, velcro, buttons, snaps, pockets, shoe laces, a belt section with buckle, a bib overall strap and button, or suspenders. With these items being properly affixed to a larger piece of material it is something simple to lay across the lap of your loved one to offer them a multitude of activities to allow them to safely fidget. Keep in mind that each individual's needs will have to be considered as you explore interests and safety issues related to choking hazards or pinching of fingers.

Another great option is a fidget or activity board. These can easily be constructed from scrap wood laying around the house. Items that can be attached to the board might include: door knob, door handle, lock with key (key can be connected with wire so as not to lose it), hasp lock, chain lock, drawer handle to slide little door back and forth or small door attached with hinges, garden faucet handle, different types of light switches, utility strap with quick release buckle and short straps, snap hook (like on a dog leash) with short leash section, carabiner clip with a short rope, or a small bungee cord permanently attached on one end. The board should be properly prepared and sanded or covered to avoid splintering. The board can lay on a table or in the lap of your loved one, or it can be constructed to stand on a table. Again, being mindful of safety is important.

Another idea is to designate a special drawer in a cabinet full of safe items for your loved one to fidget with or dig through. It may also help to have a shoe box in a strategic location filled with similar items. The items could be things already around the house in a 'junk drawer' but making sure to pull out items that could be dangerous and/or choking hazards. Items might include fat pencils (unsharpened), small rulers (6 inches), large buttons affixed to a strip of fabric, tape measure, measuring spoons, old remote controls (without batteries), stress ball, old keys on a key ring, deck of cards, plastic slinky, rubix



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cube, or mini stuffed animals to name a few. A multitude of textures and colors might also be appealing to your loved one. Sometimes a variety of oddball items can be picked up from your local dollar store to fill a drawer or shoe box. Be creative but keep safety in mind.

These are just a few options to consider when looking for ways to keep your loved one who is confused or living with dementia busy, but in a safe way. Though your loved one may not be able to tell you, this busy-ness or safe fidgeting may be very comforting to them and provide much needed sensory stimulation, which in turn may help calm their nerves and/or help to reduce their anxiety.

For more information check out dailycaring.com and search their website for 'busy hands'.

It's time to live Fall Free by Erin Wells, Community Resources Manager at ADRC-CW

Falling is very common in older adults. So common that one in four adults (age 65+) fall each year. What is important to know is that falling is NOT a normal part of aging and there are steps you can take to reduce your risk of falling. It is important and take action now. Wisconsin has the highest death rate due to falls for older adults of any state in the country (Wisconsin Institute for Health Aging).

According to the CDC, the National Council on Aging and the Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging, you can start to reduce your risk of falling by taking these steps:

1. Engage in balance and strength exercises that are proven to reduce falls. Talk to a physical therapist for recommendations.
2. Talk to your health care provider. Ask for an assessment of your risk of falling. And share your history of recent falls.
3. Regularly review your medications with your pharmacist and your doctor. Make sure side effects aren't increasing your risk of falling and take medications only as prescribed.
4. Get your vision and hearing checked annually and update your eyeglasses. People with untreated vision or hearing losses are more than three times as likely to fall.
5. Keep your home safe. Remove tripping hazards, increase lighting, make stairs safe and install grab bars in key areas.
6. Talk to your family members. Enlist their support in taking simple steps to stay safe. It takes all of us to help keep older adults safe.

**Reduce Your
FALL RISK**

For more information on falls or to take a "check up" on your fall risk, visit the National Council on Aging:

<https://www.ncoa.org/healthy-aging/falls-prevention/falls-free-checkup/>

The Aging and Disability Resource Center of Central Wisconsin can provide more information and resources in your efforts to stay fall free. Call the ADRC-CW at 888-486-9545 or visit www.adrc-cw.org

Enjoy our world, from the Comfort of Your Home this winter!



<https://pixabay.com/photos/yellowstone-national-park-wyoming-1581879/>

Virtual National Park Tours:

<https://parkit.npca.org/tagged/virtualtours>

Virtual Museum Tours Around the World:

<https://www.museumnext.com/article/the-best-free-virtual-tours-of-museums-in-the-world/>



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Don't Overlook Depression submitted by Jane Mahoney, Caregiver Support Specialist, Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources

Do you feel sad, empty, and hopeless much of the day? Are you having trouble sleeping, eating, or functioning? Have you lost interest in things that you used to enjoy? These are all signs of depression, a medical illness that affects how you feel, the way you think and how you act.

Depression often goes undiagnosed and untreated as people tend to downplay the symptoms or blame them on other things. While it's normal to feel sad and have a lack of energy occasionally, these feelings shouldn't persist for more than a few days. Right now, with the cold darkness of winter and the pandemic raging, depression symptoms are on the rise. Depression is treatable and should not be overlooked as a possible cause of feeling sad and hopeless.

Symptoms of depression can vary from person to person, but anyone who has been experiencing five or more of the following symptoms for more than two weeks should contact their health care provider.

- Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Change in appetite resulting in weight gain or loss
- Loss of pleasure and interest in activities once enjoyed
- Irritability, restlessness
- Crying too often or too much
- Aches and pains that don't go away when treated
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feeling guilty, hopeless, or worthless
- Thoughts of death or suicide



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Caregivers in particular need to be aware of the risk of depression. According to a survey by the Family Caregiver Alliance, caregivers experience depression at twice the rate of the general population. The added responsibility and stress of caring for a loved one, especially during a pandemic, can have a negative impact on a caregiver's health if steps are not taken to stay healthy. If depression goes untreated it can lead to increased emotional and physical problems as well as affect your ability to care for your loved one.

If diagnosed with depression, treatment usually includes medication, counseling, or a combination of the two. You can also practice these coping mechanisms to relieve symptoms of depression.

- Communicate your feelings with friends, family, a support group, or mental health professional.
- Set limits – don't try to do more than you can handle. Ask for help.
- Take care of your body – eat well, get enough sleep, and exercise regularly
- Learn ways to manage stress and relax. Schedule time each day to do something for yourself.
- Maintain a good sense of humor. Find humor in daily events.

Knowing the symptoms of depression and understanding ways to reduce your risk of depression can help you stay healthy. Don't overlook the seriousness of depression. If you or someone you know exhibits the signs of depression, seek medical help. Life can be enjoyable!

Interested in learning more about taking care of your mental well-being as a caregiver?

Consider joining in a **virtual** event on **Wednesday February 24th at 1:00 pm** with Andrea Gilmore-Bykovskiy, PhD, RN from UW-Madison for a discussion about coping and resilience while caregiving during COVID-19. Discussion will include strategies to support mental well-being while caregiving in new challenges as well as resources that are available.

Contact the **ADRC of Portage County** for more information or to register: **715-346- 1401**

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COVID-19 Vaccine is in the Pipeline. The Scammers Won't be Far Behind! Excerpt from Wisconsin Senior Medicare Patrol December 2020 Newsletter

The Food and Drug Administration, FDA, has authorized two vaccines from pharmaceutical manufacturers, these vaccines are now being distributed to federal- and state-approved locations. For most people living in the U.S., states and territories will make the final decisions on who will get the vaccines and when. States are also working on their own specific vaccination plans. You can check with Wisconsin Department for Health Services for the latest information regarding the vaccine: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/vaccine-about.htm>. While we enter the distribution phase of the vaccine, there's no doubt scammers are scheming.

Here's what you need to know to avoid a vaccine-related scam:

- You likely will not need to pay anything out of pocket to get the vaccine during this public health emergency.
- You cannot pay to put your name on a list to get the vaccine.
- You cannot pay to get early access to the vaccine.
- No one from a vaccine distribution site or health care payer, like a private insurance company, will call you asking for your Social Security number or your credit card or bank account information to sign you up to get the vaccine.
- Beware of providers offering other products, treatments, or medicines to prevent the virus. Check with your health care provider before paying for or receiving any COVID-19-related treatment.
- If you get a call, text, email, see an advertisement — or even someone knocking on your door — claiming they can get you early access to the vaccine, STOP. That is a scam. Do not pay for a promise of vaccine access or share personal information. Instead, contact the Wisconsin Senior Medicare Patrol Helpline at (888) 818-2611 to notify them of this development and you can also report it to the FTC at [ReportFraud.ftc.gov](https://www.ftc.gov/report-fraud).

Engage in Virtual Leisure Activities at Home

Alzheimer's Foundation of America (AFA) offers virtual events, such as storytelling, meditation, music, chair yoga, art, care connection for caregivers, gardening, and more. Find a list of upcoming events on their website <https://alzfdn.org/events/list/>. Events are held live on their Facebook page and can be viewed at a later time if not viewed live.



<https://pixabay.com/illustrations/webinar-conferencing-video-beverage-3199164/>

Take care of YOU, while caregiving, with Powerful Tools for Caregivers



Powerful Tools is a six-week workshop that teaches you how to take care of yourself while caring for someone else. By taking care of your own physical, emotional and financial needs, you become a better caregiver. The workshop gives you the tools to reduce stress and negative emotions, manage time and set goals, make difficult caregiving decisions, and communicate effectively with the person needing care, family members, doctors, and paid helpers.

Join us for a VIRTUAL workshop this spring on **Wednesdays, April 14th-May 19th from 1:00-2:45pm.** *To participate, you must have access to a computer or tablet with internet, audio, and a camera.

To register, contact Scott or Kacie at the Aging & Disability Resource Center of Central Wisconsin via email scott.seeger@adrc-cw.org or kacie.niemuth@adrc-cw.org or by calling 1-888-486-9545