



Senior Focus

A Guide to Healthy Living For Seniors & Others



Alzheimer's: An early diagnosis can make a big difference

(BPT) - After 30 years of painting commercial buildings, Mario Martinez of San Jose, California, had experienced days like this before - grueling hours under a sun-soaked sky, doing back-breaking work. He loved his job, but after spending hours outside he was ready to go home.

Mario bent down to pick up his paintbrush, roller and can. Turning back to look at his day's work, he paused. His heart sank. He knew something was wrong.

"Mario came home and told me he had painted the wrong side of the doors on the building," his wife Veronica said. "It was alarming because he's been painting buildings for years and never made this kind of mistake. It worried us both."

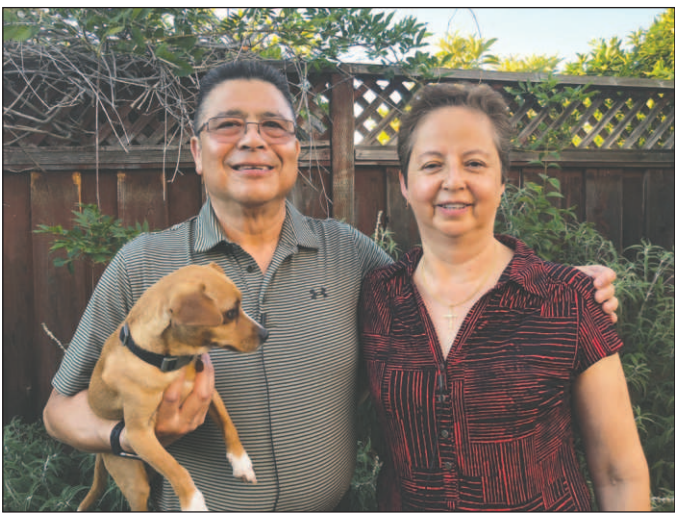
The couple had both noticed that Mario seemed to be more forgetful recently, but neither had shared their concerns with the other. Now that Mario's memory lapses were interfering with his work, it was time to talk.

Take action through conversation

"Veronica told me I was asking for more and more help," Mario said. "I told her that I was forgetting a lot of the things she asked me to do. The more we talked, the more I realized I had a problem. I was forgetting many moments in my life and not enjoying activities that I had enjoyed before."

The couple's difficult conversation led Mario to his doctor's office and he was eventually diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

Mario is not alone. He is one of more than 5 million Americans living with Alzheimer's - a fatal brain disease that causes problems with memory, thinking and behavior. Every 65



Courtesy BPT

Every 65 seconds someone in the United States develops Alzheimer's disease and it's the country's sixth-leading cause of death.

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Despite Alzheimer's growing impact, many families struggle with discussing the issue. A recent Alzheimer's Association survey reveals that 72 percent of Americans say that talking to close family members about cognitive decline would be challenging for them. However, having these difficult, but important conversations sooner can prevent a crisis and improve health options and outcomes.

Reach out for help

To encourage and help more families discuss cognitive problems sooner, the Alzheimer's Association, in partnership with the Ad Council, has launched the "Our Stories" campaign. "Our Stories" features real stories of people who noticed cognitive changes in a family member and took the first, difficult step to initiate a conversation.

"It's understandable that many families are reluctant to express their concerns and

start a conversation, but there are good reasons to do so," said Ruth Drew, director of information and support services, Alzheimer's Association. "Initiating conversations sooner can enable early diagnosis, which offers many important benefits, including allowing more time for critical care planning, better disease management and providing diagnosed individuals a voice in their future care."

The "Our Stories" website (alz.org/ourstories) offers families tools and resources, including customizable conversation starters, a list of early signs and symptoms of Alzheimer's, benefits of early diagnosis, a downloadable discussion guide and other resources.

Whether you're noticing changes in yourself or a loved one, starting a conversation about Alzheimer's can be difficult, but it can make a big difference and there are resources to help. When something feels different, it could be Alzheimer's - now is the time to talk.

Great ways to keep your mind sharp

(STATEPOINT) - When you think about exercise, you likely envision using the treadmill or lifting weights. But every bit as important to your long-term health and wellness are activities that keep your mind sharp and your cognitive abilities strong and limber.

Here are several things you can do to help keep your mind sharp:

• Solve a Crossword Puzzle:

A crossword puzzle asks you to reach into your long-term memory bank to solve clues. You may be filling in boxes, but well-constructed crossword puzzles will require you to think outside the box, as sometimes clues are a bit trickier than they seem at first glance, relying on word play or double meanings to work. A relaxing way to unwind and concentrate, consider adding this ritual into your morning.

• Get More from Nature:

On your next nature hike, don't check out mentally. Set goals and keep your senses alert, paying attention to sounds, sights and smells. New tech, such as Casio WSD-F30 Pro Trek Smart Outdoor Watch, can help. The watch features apps to support your hike, including Location Memory to record information on trails and viewpoints along the way,



Courtesy STATEPOINT

A crossword puzzle asks you to reach into your long-term memory bank to solve clues.

as well as Moment Setter to notify you when you reach your targeted altitude.

• **Learn a Language:** A multilingual brain works more efficiently, and it is never too late to pick up a new language. There are many languages apps available to help, some of them free, as well as more traditional taped audio lessons you can pop on while commuting to work or doing chores around the house.

• **Make Math Fun:** Want to build your critical thinking skills and improve your ability to problem solve? Delve into mathematics with fun math puzzles found online. Free online software, such as ClassPad.net, includes

resources to help you solve problems, from simple calculations to statistics, graphing and more.

• **Get Sleep:** Sufficient high-quality sleep is one of the most fundamental ways to maintain a sharp mind and keep your brain healthy through the years. Between 7-9 hours a night is ideal for adults, according to the National Sleep Foundation. If you aren't sleeping well, or feel foggy during the day, consider how to shift your evening routine to get more and better quality sleep.

From math puzzles to crossword puzzles to nature walks, prioritizing workouts for the mind will help you stay sharp.

Ask the expert: Vision health as you age

(BPT) - Many people expect their eyesight to decline with age - perhaps requiring a stronger eyeglass prescription or "readers." Some vision changes are linked to age, but there are steps to consider to help our eyes stay as healthy as possible.

Dr. Linda Chous, OD, chief eye care officer, United-

Healthcare, answered the following questions:

1. Are my eyes going to keep getting worse as I age?

While your eyesight is not guaranteed to deteriorate with age, it is normal to notice changes to your vision as the years pass, including:

• Minor adjustments to your eyeglasses prescription or needing to use "readers" for the first time;

• Trouble distinguishing colors, such as blue from black; and

• The need for more light to see well.

Although these changes

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Signs your aging parents may need more help at home

(STATEPOINT) - Every day, roughly 10,000 baby boomers nationwide turn 65, according to the Pew Research Center,

which means that a growing number of Americans are dealing with the many challenges associated with aging

parents or relatives. Among them is determining when parents may need assistance they aren't currently receiving.

"Asking for help and depending on others for care may make an individual feel like a burden to family or friends. The goal of home care should be to strengthen the mind and the body, lift spirits and support loved ones in a way that makes life worth living," says Jennifer Sheets, president and chief executive officer of Caring Brands International and Interim HealthCare Inc. "This whole person and individualized approach allows caregivers to look for ways to empower

people at home."

Unfortunately, when seniors struggle with basic tasks such as self-care, transportation or household chores, they don't always talk about it. They may be embarrassed or afraid of losing their independence or homes. Still others may not even realize anything is amiss, particularly if they're in the beginning stages of dementia.

Interim HealthCare shares some warning signs that an aging loved one may be in need of senior care:

- A change in mood, such as depression, anxiety or a loss of interest in social activities and hobbies.
- Significant weight loss,

which can happen for a variety of reasons, including serious physical and mental disorders.

• **Issues with mobility and balance.** These can be signs of joint, muscle or neurological problems, and increase the likelihood of falls.

• **Bruises, cuts or scrapes** are sometimes evidence of falls or kitchen mishaps, and a potential indication of declining physical agility.

• **Piles of bills, un-watered plants and overflowing hampers** -- these are just a few of the many signs that basic tasks are being neglected.

• **New dents or dings on your parents' vehicle.** These could be signs that safe driving has become an issue.

• **Stains, missing buttons and untrimmed nails,** are signs of neglected personal hygiene.

• **No food in the house, or moldy, stale or spoiled food,** might mean a parent is struggling to grocery shop or cook, or may have even lost interest in eating.

• **A prescription stockpile** could indicate your parent

is forgetting to take critical pills.

• **Stacks of unopened bills, late payment notices, unbalanced checkbooks and wads of cash stashed in odd places,** are all signs of mismanaged money.

If a parent requires extra care, consider all your options, including in-home assistance, which allows older adults to continue living at home, while getting needed help. Look for care that offers a whole-person approach, such as Interim HealthCare's HomeLife Enrichment standard of care, which looks beyond basic needs to encompass mind, body, spirit and family to develop specific protocols and interactive activities that stimulate the brain, improve motor functions and help seniors feel in control of their days. To learn more, visit interimhealthcare.com.

If your parents are displaying signs of needed care, getting them this support is crucial -- both for their immediate health and safety, as well as their overall happiness and wellness.

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Six questions to ask your healthcare provider about out-of-pocket medication costs

(BPT) - Even in the privacy of a doctor's office, many patients hesitate to discuss one subject - money.

While nearly one in four Americans over the age of 50 feels stressed about their medical bills, only half of those have spoken to their healthcare provider about it, according to a University of Michigan poll. But it pays to ask about the cost of your treatment. The same poll found that two-thirds of patients who talked to their healthcare provider about drug costs received a recommendation for a lower-cost alternative.

Speaking with your healthcare provider about treatment options and out-of-pocket costs should be one of the first things you do after being diagnosed with a chronic illness. But sometimes it can be hard to know how to start the conversation, or what questions to ask. As the largest independent charitable organization dedicated to helping people pay out-of-pocket costs for

their prescribed treatments, the Patient Access Network (PAN) Foundation helps patients manage the financial burden of care every day. Dan Klein, President and CEO of the PAN Foundation, suggests asking your healthcare provider the following questions if you are concerned about the cost of your medication.

1. Can you or someone in your office help me find out how much this medication will cost out-of-pocket?

Although drug prices fluctuate, and patients pay different amounts depending on their health insurance, healthcare providers or their staff can usually provide an estimated cost for a treatment or can call your pharmacy and find out. This simple question is an easy way to start the cost-of-care conversation and let your healthcare provider know that you want to explore ways to minimize your costs.

2. Does this medication have a generic equivalent



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that I can use?

Many brand-name drugs, especially those that have been on the market for a long time, have generic equivalents that are significantly cheaper. These generic copies contain identical active ingredients and are rigorously tested by the FDA to ensure they are as safe and effective as the brand-name versions.

3. Could a change in dosage or frequency help reduce my costs, but still be effective?

Out-of-pocket costs should not prevent you from accessing and adhering to your treatment. But controlled changes to your dosage or frequency may help you lower your costs without compromising effectiveness. It's crucial that this is only

done under medical advice, as making cost-cutting decisions without your healthcare provider's input can be harmful.

4. Is there a less expensive way to receive my treatment?

Depending on your condition, there may be multiple ways to receive treatment, some more expensive than others. For example, oral anti-cancer agents have become an increasingly common part of cancer treatment plans but are sometimes more expensive than traditional intravenous (I.V.) administration. Be sure to ask your healthcare provider if there is a cheaper treatment option for you that meets your healthcare needs.

5. Do you have drug coupon discount cards for my medication, or free samples?

Drug companies often give healthcare providers discount coupons or free samples to dispense to patients. It can be easy for healthcare providers to forget about these, so don't be afraid to

ask! Drug manufacturer discount coupons can only be used by those with commercial insurance, not by people with Medicare or Medicaid.

6. Can you or someone in your office help me find financial assistance to cover my costs? Is there a charitable foundation that I can apply to?

Charitable foundations, like PAN, can help patients pay their out-of-pocket costs for prescription medications. Your healthcare provider's office should be familiar with these programs and can point you in the right direction. You can learn more about patient assistance charities and connect with resources to help you manage your chronic illness at panfoundation.org. You can also download the FundFinder app from that website, which will notify you when assistance becomes available from any of the major charitable patient assistance foundations.

VISION

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

are often normal, they can also be signs of conditions like cataracts or even diabetes. It is important to maintain regular appointments with your eye doctor to help identify pressing concerns. If you experience sudden vision loss or any rapid change to your eyesight, contact your eye care provider immediately.

2. What are the tiny spots or specks that float across my vision?

These tiny threads of protein float across the gel-like substance between your

eye's lens and retina.

Usually there is no need to worry if you notice these spots occasionally and they disappear after a few minutes, but only a dilated eye examination can determine the cause of the "floaters."

If your vision is overcome by these specks or you notice vision loss, contact your eye doctor, as it could be a symptom of a sight-threatening condition

3. What are some common vision-related diseases that come with age?

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD)

AMD is the leading cause of vision loss in people over

65. AMD causes damage to the macula, the small spot on the retina that enables people to see clearly and view things straight ahead of them.

Common symptoms are distortion and blurring of the center of your field of vision. If caught early, there are potential benefits from certain prescription medications and nutritional supplements. Late-stage AMD is much more difficult to treat.

Certain factors like heredity, ultraviolet light exposure and smoking may increase the risk of AMD. Consult with your eye doctor to determine if a preventive treatment plan is right for you.

Cataracts

A cataract is the clouding of the lens in your eye, blocking the flow of light to the back of your eye (retina), which ultimately causes loss of sight. Most form slowly and do not cause pain. Significant clouding can form in some people and, ultimately, negatively impact vision.

Cataracts are treatable via surgery that replaces the clouded lens with a clear

plastic lens. Cataract surgery is generally safe and one of the most common surgeries in the U.S. Once a cataract is removed, it cannot grow back.

Glaucoma

Glaucoma is caused by increased pressure inside the eye, which can cause permanent vision loss and blindness if untreated. The most common form usually has no noticeable symptoms in the early stages - the only way to detect it is routine testing.

Treatment may include prescription eye drops, oral medications, laser treatment surgery or a combination of any of these. It is important to find glaucoma early because once vision is lost, it cannot be regained.

4. What are the best ways to keep my eyes healthy as I age?

Some of the best ways to protect your eyes include:

- * Stop smoking. Smokers are up to four times more likely to develop AMD and may contribute to development of cataracts.
- * Maintain a healthy

weight. Conditions associated with being overweight, like diabetes and heart disease, increase your risk of vision loss from cataracts, glaucoma and retinopathy.

- * Wear sunglasses. Help protect your eyes from harmful ultraviolet rays.

- * Be physically active. People who are physically active experienced less vision loss over 20 years compared to those who are less active.

- * Eat a healthy diet. Colorful fruits and vegetables contain nutrients that can keep your eyes healthy and reduce AMD risk.

5. Do sunglasses really protect my eyes?

Sunglasses act as a buffer between your eyes and the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays. Exposure to these rays can put you at greater risk of cataracts and AMD. Look for a pair that blocks 99% to 100% of UV rays.

Note that polarization is different from UV protection; however, most polarized sunglasses also provide UV protection. Check the product tag or ask for assistance

in choosing the right pair.

6. How often should I see my eye care doctor?

Eye exams are crucial to maintaining eye health as you age. Many eye diseases, like glaucoma, have no symptoms in early stages. And many systemic conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure, can be first found during a routine eye exam. Aim to see your eye doctor annually even if your vision hasn't changed, so your doctor has a record of your eye health. See your doctor immediately for sudden changes.

For UnitedHealthcare Medicare Advantage members, many plans include routine vision services as well as additional services not covered under Original Medicare. It's helpful to learn how to take advantage of these and other benefits.

Plans insured through UnitedHealthcare Insurance Company or one of its affiliated companies, a Medicare Advantage organization with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in the plan depends on the plan's contract renewal with Medicare.

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