Relationships
Leaving the Family Home

Most middle-aged and younger Americans are used to packing up and moving several times over their careers. According to the US Census, about 1 in 10 Americans moved within the previous year (down from 1 in 5 in the 1960’s). Seven out of ten of these moved someplace nearby in the same county. For nearly half of these, the primary reason for moving was to find better or more appropriate housing.

Around 4 in 10 Americans still live in the community where they were born. This is particularly true among seniors in rural areas. They are often surrounded by extended family and their work is nearby. Some of these seniors are the residents and keepers of “the family home,” perhaps with ties to several generations of the family. The sense of “belong-ing” in these communities is very strong for these seniors.

Unfortunately, these older family homes often lack the design characteristics that seniors often need. Narrow doorways, stairs and small bathrooms can become serious challenges for seniors. And beyond a home’s physical limitations, as seniors become
less able to handle their basic activities of daily living, families and seniors themselves must consider a move to some sort of assisted living facility.

Seniors often resist moving from their long-term home, for many reasons. They are comfortable there, they know the neighborhood and they have invested time, money and love in the property. Beyond that, many seniors have seen and heard horror stories from the past (some real and some exaggerated) about “nursing homes” (their catch-all term for all senior living facilities).

If remaining in the family home becomes unsafe for a senior, safer options must be considered. If the challenges are relatively minor, such as cleaning and meal preparation, families often hire aides to come into the home to help. If conditions are more serious, however, families sometimes insist that the senior move to more specialized care and housing.

Such a move often represents a serious sense of loss for the senior – loss of some independence, loss of contact with neighbors, loss of responsibility for maintaining a family heirloom, loss of familiarity and routine, and perhaps some loss of pride in one’s autonomy. It’s no wonder seniors often resist moving!

Any significant loss also brings a sense of grief. Family members sometimes fail to recognize grieving in a senior who has moved. Grief can be mistaken for sadness, depression or unusual acting out.

Most people have heard about the so-called stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. We know today that these may or may not occur in any given individual and loss, they may occur in any order, and they may reoccur. Grief is an individual experience with no predictable timeframe. Recognizing that a senior will likely experience grief with a move can be an important step in providing the best support for that process.

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Mold is a common concern in many homes in Georgia. Mold just needs moisture and organic matter to grow, which means you can find it in many places in your home. Mold not only damages your
property, it can also impact your health. New mold colonies can form in as little as 3 days, so you need to act quickly.

Generally you do not need to test mold. It is better to spend your money and efforts on cleaning it up. If you have asthma, severe allergies, or other health concerns, you should consider hiring a reputable firm to clean up the mold. There are no licensing requirements in Georgia so shop carefully, obtain written quotes and do not pay in advance for the work.

If you need to, or choose to clean up on your own, follow the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guidelines below for safe removal of mold.

1. Wear protective gear during cleanup. Reduce skin exposure by wearing gloves, long sleeves, long pants and sturdy shoes. To avoid breathing spores or fragments, wear a respirator rated N-95 or higher. To protect your eyes, wear goggles.

2. Isolate work areas and ventilate to outdoors. Cleaning disturbs mold colonies which can result in a large release of spores into the air. Seal off the areas being cleaned. Open windows and do not run the air conditioning system during cleanup.

3. Remove and discard moldy materials. You may want to throw out porous or contaminated materials. This includes carpeting, carpet padding, mattresses, and paper products. If the wall board or insulation have gotten wet from a flood situation, cut away the wet wallboard and remove the damp insulation. Dispose of them and replace with new materials. If textile products are affected, you may be able to wash them. To reduce the release of mold spores, cover moldy material with plastic sheeting before removing them from your home.

4. Clean all surfaces with a damp sponge or cloth and a mild detergent. You do not need to use bleach or a disinfectant.

5. After cleaning, air the space out using fans or opening the windows.

6. Dry the area as quickly as possible. Once the area has been cleaned and you have aired out the house, you can close the windows and use air conditioning, fans and a dehumidifier to speed the drying process.

7. Remain on mold alert. Continue looking for signs of moisture or new mold growth.

For more information contact your local county extension office or go online (http://www.fcs.uga.edu/extension/mold-safety).
Nutrition
Should I be worried about getting enough vitamin D?

Vitamin D is an important nutrient that our bodies use in many ways. Vitamin D is important for building up bones and keeping them strong. Vitamin D works with calcium to protect older adults from osteoporosis, a disease that makes bones easier to break. Vitamin D is also important for helping our immune system do its job. This means that vitamin D can play a role in many different diseases.

Scientists are currently trying to figure out if vitamin D is important for preventing and treating many diseases like cancer and depression. As you can see, vitamin D is important for our health and we may learn more about this important vitamin in the future. For now, we know that it is important to get enough vitamin D to keep our bones and immune systems healthy.

Vitamin D is found naturally in only a few foods. Fatty fishes such as salmon, tuna, sardines, and mackerel are really good sources of vitamin D. Cheese and egg yolks also have some vitamin D, but you would have to eat a lot of them to get the vitamin D you need to keep your body healthy. Because vitamin D isn’t found in many foods, in the United States, some foods have vitamin D added to them. For example, milk has vitamin D added and is an important source of vitamin D for most Americans. Yogurt, orange juice, and breakfast cereals with added vitamin D can also help us meet our needs.

You may have also heard that our bodies can make some vitamin D. Yes, our bodies can make some vitamin D when our skin is exposed to sunlight, but the amount we can make is different from person to person. Our skin color, sunscreen use, age, the time of day, and the time of year can all affect how much vitamin D our skin can make.

As we get older, our skin cannot make vitamin D as well as when we were younger. It is also common for older people to spend more time indoors or wear sunscreen to prevent skin cancer. You should keep using sunscreen to prevent skin cancer, as skin cancer is very dangerous and we can get vitamin D in other ways.
You should enjoy foods that are good sources of vitamin D every day if you are able to eat them. Because it can be hard to get the vitamin D you need from foods, you should talk to your doctor about whether or not you may need to take a vitamin D supplement. Your doctor may wish to test the vitamin D level in your blood to see if you have enough before deciding if you need a supplement. If you do need a supplement, your doctor will tell you what type of vitamin D and how much to take. Remember, too much vitamin D is not better than too little. It is always important to discuss any vitamin, mineral, or herbal supplements with your family doctor and your pharmacist because they may have a bad reaction with medications you are taking.

Salmon (or Tuna) Patties

This recipe uses four foods that contain vitamin D: canned salmon, milk, eggs, and breakfast cereal with added vitamin D. You could also use canned tuna in water for this recipe.

1 can salmon (15 1/2 ounce, drained)
1 cup breakfast cereal with vitamin D added, like corn flakes or toasted rice cereal (crushed)
2 large eggs, lightly beaten
1/2 cup low fat milk (1%)
1/8 teaspoon black pepper
1 tablespoon vegetable oil

Directions
1. Use a fork or clean fingers to flake salmon until very fine.
2. Crumble cereal or crackers into crumbs.
3. Add cereal or cracker crumbs, eggs, milk, and pepper to salmon.
4. Mix thoroughly.
5. Shape into 9 patties.
7. Over medium heat, carefully brown both the sides until patty is thoroughly cooked.

Note: Whole grain crackers can be used in place of cereal. Replace the salmon with canned tuna fish. For fun, do a combination of the two! You can try these optional additions for extra flavor: 1/2 teaspoon lemon pepper, 1/4 cup finely minced celery, 1 Tablespoon finely minced bell pepper, 1/3 cup chopped onion, and/or 4 green onions, finely chopped.
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Past editions of Senior Sense are available at:
http://www.fcs.uga.edu/ext/pubs/

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