

Senior Sense

Your Resources

Reducing Heating Costs This Winter

Energy prices rise and fall on a regular basis, so it is always a good time to make your home more energy efficient. This is a good time of year to invest in your home so you stay warm and comfortable when the temperature drops. Here are five relatively inexpensive projects you can do or have done to make your home tighter and more energy efficient.

1. Have a qualified professional service your heating system before the cold weather arrives.

Maintaining your system will save money in the long run.

2. Seal the cracks and crevices inside and outside your home. Pay particular attention to holes around cables, plumbing pipes and electrical boxes, as well as those spots around windows and doors

where siding or bricks and wood trim meet. Use expandable foam-sealant products around doors and windows then finish off with caulking. Make sure all products are low in volatile organic compounds (VOC), so additional contaminants are not added to your indoor environment.

3. Replace the furnace filter and clean air registers, baseboard heaters and radiators. A dirty filter slows down air flow and makes the system work harder to keep you warm or cool, thus wasting energy.

4. Install a programmable thermostat. Lowering the heat from 72 degrees to 65 degrees on the days you are away from home can save as much as 10 percent on your heating costs. Remember when you lower the heat to dress warmly.

5. Insulate your water heater. If you haven't insulated your water

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heater, you may be losing heat into the surrounding area, which in turn will make the water heater work overtime to keep the water hot. If you have an electric water heater then you may be able to insulate the tank yourself with a pre-cut jacket or blanket. Just be sure you don't set the thermostat over 130 degrees Fahrenheit. For gas and oil-fired water heaters, it is advisable to have a qualified plumbing and heating contractor add the insulation.

For more information and tips on saving energy, go to the UGA Cooperative Extension College of Family and Consumer Sciences website (http://fcs.uga.edu/ext/housing/conserve_index.php).

Your Relationships

Brothers, Sisters and Caregiving (Part 2)

In the last edition of Senior Sense, we looked at some of the reasons that caregiving decisions among adult siblings can be complicated and stressful. In the conclusion of this topic here, let's discuss some tips for reaching decisions with siblings that everyone can support.

Remember that disagreements and hurt feelings simmering from years ago

can flare up when siblings discuss caregiving for Mom or Dad. Decisions that seem pretty routine can suddenly lead to tears and shouting. This kind of reaction is a clear signal that there is more to this decision than meets the eye. If this kind of exchange occurs, try to remain calm, ask for some time alone to think about things, and then resume the conversation focusing on the issue at hand.

Here are some more tips for agreeing on ways to work together with your siblings:

- **Each sibling has a different relationship with a parent – and with each other.** You might think that since everyone is part of the same family, everyone's relationships are pretty much the same. You would be wrong. Each sibling's relationship with a parent is unique, despite many shared family experiences. Has your brother ever described a childhood family experience that was very important to him, but that you don't recall at all? Our memories, of the good times and bad, influence our relationships as adults.
- **Consider carefully what you really want from your siblings.** Do you really want them to help

more, and if so, are you willing to give up that control? Would you like more financial support from them? Or would you just appreciate some appreciation for all you do? Do you want to help more, but feel like your parent rebuffs your efforts?

Don't get caught in the guilt & anger cycle

- **Don't get caught in the guilt and anger cycle.** Siblings (and parents) know all the guilt buttons to push. Sometimes a little guilt can motivate you to do what you know you should, but more often it results in anger and defensiveness. When you're feeling guilty and defensive, you're more likely to react angrily and emotionally – making your sibling feel defensive and angry too. The cycle starts.
- **Decide that differing legal powers and inheritance will not destroy your family.** Ideally, parents discuss decisions like living wills, powers of attorney and distribution of assets with their adult children while everyone is fully capable and involved. In many families, however, parents don't share their wishes until the

will is read – or they don't even make a will. This can create a minefield of misunderstanding and hurt feelings. When parents do divide their estate unequally, it is usually because they believe one child has a greater need – but that assessment may not be shared by siblings. Remember that there probably is no allocation of caregiving responsibilities or inheritance that everyone will consider to be completely fair. Recognize that fact and focus on the greater good of maintaining family ties.

- **Get help from an outside professional.** Some sibling disagreements are just too deep-seated to resolve within the family. You may benefit from talking with a family therapist, geriatric social worker, or member of the clergy, either individually or as a family.

Adult siblings today may be very close, physically and emotionally, or they may be very distant. In any case, caregiving responsibilities can drive siblings apart or draw them closer, depending on the ways you consider your own wants and needs, and how you communicate them

to others. When parents are alive, they are often the focal point of the family...the place where families congregate at holidays. When parents are gone, siblings face decisions about how they'll relate to one another going forward. Your siblings are what remains of your original family, and for most people, this relationship becomes more important after parents are gone.

Adapted from Family Caregiver Alliance, 2011.

Your Health

Keeping Drugs Out of the Reach of Children

Children under the age of five are more likely to go to an emergency room due to poisoning from a toxic dose of medicine than from an automobile crash. Do you find that hard to believe? You shouldn't. Just think about all the people you know who take several different drugs every day and how often their medicines are just sitting around the house. It is not uncommon for an older adult to be on five or more medicines a day.

While a child can accidentally ingest any drug, the most common ones are diabetes pills, medicines to manage or prevent cardiovascular disease, pain medicines

and drugs to help a person sleep or calm down. The children who take these drugs may not only need a visit to an emergency room, but also an admission to the hospital, or even the intensive care unit.

To be safe, always secure your drugs in a locked cabinet or container. Even if you have child-proof medicine bottles, there is always a chance that a child will manage to open them.

Here are some other ways you can minimize this danger for your loved ones:

- Keep all medicines in their original containers with the proper labels. Never store medicine in old food or beverage containers.
- Do not take medicine in front of children.
- Ask your pharmacist about how to get rid of medicines you no longer use. The drug store may have days when you can turn in old medicines or you may be able to buy a special pouch so you can send old medicines to a company for disposal.
- Teach family members to never eat or drink anything they do not recognize.

- If you suspect a child has been poisoned by a medicine or any other substance, call 1-800-222-1212. This will link you to the closest poison control center. Call **before** you try to treat the child yourself, even if the package recommends a special antidote.

Festive Fruit Dip

Here is a delicious way to serve fruit as an appetizer, snack or dessert. Great for kids and adults!

1 (8 ounce) package reduced fat cream cheese

2 cups non-fat plain yogurt

6 packets artificial sweetener

Assorted cut-up fruit (melon, bananas, apples)

Assorted berries (strawberries, blueberries, raspberries)

1 ½ teaspoons vanilla extract

1 (11 ounce) can mandarin oranges, drained

1 cup orange juice

1. In a medium mixing bowl, combine the cream cheese, yogurt, vanilla extract and sweetener. Using an electric mixer, blend until smooth.
2. Save 3 mandarin orange sections for a garnish. Put the remaining orange

sections in a small bowl. Mash with a fork. Do a few sections at a time to make it easier. Drain off the juice and add the mashed oranges to the cream cheese mixture. Stir well.

3. Refrigerate dip for at least two hours to let flavors blend.

4. Before serving, cut up the melon, bananas and apples into bite-size pieces. Dip in the orange juice.

5. Arrange the berries, melon, bananas and apples on a serving platter with the dip in the center. Garnish the dip with the reserved mandarin orange sections or make a fruit salad and top off each with a serving of the dip. You can also layer the fruit alternatively with the dip and make a fruit parfait.

12 servings

Nutrition Analysis for the Dip Only

Calories: 82

Carbohydrate: 6 grams

Cholesterol: 15 milligrams

Dietary Fiber: 0 grams

Fat: 4 grams

Protein: 4 grams

Saturated Fat: 2.5 grams

Sodium: 95 milligrams



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Dear Friend,

SENIOR SENSE is a quarterly publication provided by your local county Cooperative Extension office. It is prepared by Extension Family & Consumer Sciences specialists at The University of Georgia specifically for the educational needs of older Georgians. Please contact your local Cooperative Extension office for more information on these and related topics.

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