Coping as a family caregiver

Special to The Catholic Commentator

Individuals are born into the world requiring the care of their parents and other adult guardians to grow and thrive. These adult children, in turn, may end up providing care when their parents reach senior age or face an illness or disability.

Becoming a family caregiver frequently is a tough choice to make. It requires patience and time, and can be emotionally and physically taxing. An estimated 43.5 million adults in the United States have provided unpaid care to an adult or a child in the prior 12 months, according to the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP Public Policy Institute.

It’s not uncommon for caregivers of any age to feel stressed and burned out by the demands of caregiving. The Mayo Clinic says people who experience caregiver stress can be vulnerable to changes in their own health. Some signs of caregiver stress include:

• Feeling overwhelmed or constantly worried
• Feeling tired most of the time
• Gaining or losing a lot of weight
• Becoming easily irritated or angry
• Losing interest in activities you used to enjoy
• Having frequent headaches, bodily pain or other physical problems

Some caregivers even resort to drugs and alcohol to self-medicate, which can lead to further issues. To avoid the potential pitfalls of caregiver stress, individuals should always put their needs first and find ways to alleviate the added stress of caring for a loved one. These suggestions are just a start.

Don’t strive for perfection

It isn’t possible to maintain a patient attitude and get everything done perfectly each and every day. People are not perfect and mistakes will be made. Do not punish yourself if you lash out or simply need a break.

Eat healthy

As anyone who has dealt with a hungry toddler can attest, failure to eat well and frequently can result in an emotional meltdown. Be sure to always make time for nutritious meals. This will help keep up energy stores and enable you to better cope with caregiver stress.

Pay attention to mood changes

Anxiety or depression can sneak up on you when you least expect it. Ask for help if you feel your tasks are becoming too overwhelming. Seek the help of a doctor if changes in mood, sleeping patterns, appetite, and the like become noticeable.

Take frequent breaks

Getting a break from caregiving and setting aside time for yourself can increase patience levels and the ability to bounce back from stress. Whenever possible, have a friend or another relative step in for you so you get a break. Explore resources available for professional aides to come and take some of the responsibilities off of your shoulders.

Being a caregiver can be a rewarding, but challenging role to play. Caregivers should keep their health a priority.

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Assistive devices help people remain mobile

Special to The Catholic Commentator

Disabilities affect people from all walks of life. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that around 55 million Americans have a disability of some kind. Of these people, 53 million have a disability that makes it difficult for them to carry out some daily activities. Statistics Canada states that, as of 2012, 13.7 percent of the population age 15 years or older reported having a disability that could impact daily life. Around 55 million Americans have a disability of some kind. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that as of 2012, 13.7 percent of the population age 15 years or older reported having a disability that could impact daily life.

People with disabilities may need assistive devices to reclaim some measure of their independence. For example, millions of people rely on wheelchairs or walking aids to get around. These are called assistive technology and rehabilitative devices, which include tools, equipment, or products that can help people with disabilities get around more easily. These devices may be as small as magnifying glasses for reading to as large as wheelchairs.

The National Institutes of Health state that 2.2 million people in the U.S depend on assistive devices help people remain mobile despite cognitive or physical disabilities.

Dementia is not a disease but a term used to define a decline in mental ability severe enough that it can interfere with daily life, offers the Alzheimer’s Association. Alzheimer’s disease is the most common type of dementia.

Dementia is not a disease but a term used to define a decline in mental ability severe enough that it can interfere with daily life, offers the Alzheimer’s Association. Alzheimer’s disease is the most common type of dementia.

Understanding dementia a key to compassionate care

Special to The Catholic Commentator

Alzheimer’s disease is one of the more prominent forms of dementia, but there are many additional types of dementia that also can cause both physical and cognitive alterations. Understanding the complexity of dementia can be beneficial to both dementia sufferers and their caregivers.

Dementia is a general term used to define a decline in mental ability severe enough that it can interfere with daily life, offers the Alzheimer’s Association. Alzheimer’s disease is the most common type of dementia.

Dementia is not a disease but a term used to describe a wide range of symptoms. The words “senility” and “dementia” are often incorrectly used interchangeably. However, serious mental decline is not a normal part of aging. Dementia presents itself through various symptoms, and memory loss alone is not enough to make a diagnosis of dementia.

Some types of dementia include:
- Alzheimer’s disease
- Vascular dementia
- Frontotemporal dementia
- Lewy body dementia
- Mixed dementia
- Other types of dementia

Assistive devices can be highly effective, but only when they are used properly and safely. Assistive devices should be measured for each user. Many users should proceed slowly and favor their stronger sides when relying on canes or walkers. Devices should not be used to climb atop other items like step stools. Children should not be allowed to play with or ride on assistive devices. If there are safety belts or locks on any assistive technology, they should be put in place before use to prevent further injury.

Rolling walkers are assistive devices that can keep individuals mobile despite cognitive or physical disabilities.
Carefully consider second career

Special to The Catholic Commentator

The days when professionals would spend their entire professional lives with a single firm are largely a thing of the past. In fact, many people not only switch companies multiple times before retirement, but some even switch professions before retiring.

As exciting as it can be to pursue a new career, men and women over 50 know that such a decision is not without risk. While younger professionals with few obligations can often handle bumps in the road on their way to a second career, older professionals making a similar move often must consider the potential effects such a pursuit might have on their families, finances and futures, including their retirements. But as difficult as it may seem to pursue a second career after your 50th birthday, there are steps men and women over 50 can take when pursuing a new career to ensure their second act is as successful as the first.

* Decide what you want, and not just what you want to do. The desire to pursue a second career no doubt stems from more than just dissatisfaction with a current profession. Many people switch jobs or even careers because they find their current careers too demanding, leaving little time for family or hobbies that have nothing to do with work. If what you really want is more time at home or more time to pursue a particular hobby, then keep this in mind when looking for a second career, and make sure that career won’t demand too much of your time. For example, if your goal in finding a new career is to get more work-life balance, then starting your own business, which can require long hours at the outset and even after the business has established itself, might not be for you. But if what you want is a more challenging career and to be your own boss, then you will likely find the cost of achieving that goal, even if that cost is more demands on your time, is worth it.

  • Assess your skillset. Professionals over 50 have lots to offer, but it’s still important for such men and women to make an honest assessment of their skillset and find a career in which those skills are transferable. Some men and women might want to pursue a second career that will make little to no use of their skillset, and that’s perfectly alright. But extra schooling might be necessary in such situations, and going back to school often times requires a considerable commitment of both time and money. For those who simply want to put their existing skills to use in a different field or environment, assess those skills and look for lines of work in which they figure to be especially valuable. If there are any particular aspects of your current job that you want to avoid in the future, consider that when assessing your skills and choosing a second career. Even if they don’t know it, established professionals over 50 have many transferable skills, and such skills can be a considerable asset when pursuing a second career, especially when those skills have been assessed and can be applied to a new profession.

  • Make a trial run. Nowhere is it more important to do a test drive than when considering a potential second career. Many men and women over 50 have turned their personal passions into successful second careers. But extra schooling might be necessary in such situations, and going back to school often times requires a considerable commitment of both time and money. For those who simply want to put their existing skills to use in a different field or environment, assess those skills and look for lines of work in which they figure to be especially valuable. If there are any particular aspects of your current job that you want to avoid in the future, consider that when assessing your skills and choosing a second career. Even if they don’t know it, established professionals over 50 have many transferable skills, and such skills can be a considerable asset when pursuing a second career, especially when those skills have been assessed and can be applied to a new profession.
Late bloomers can still secure financial future

Special to The Catholic Commentator

Today’s young professionals hear about the importance of saving for retirement seemingly from the moment they are hired. In addition to discussions with human resources personnel about employer-sponsored retirement plans, young professionals are learning about the importance of saving for retirement thanks to the abundance of financial-planning advertisements on television, the radio and the internet.

Older workers may not have been so lucky, and many may find themselves trying to play catch up as retirement age draws closer. While it’s important to begin saving for retirement as early as possible, late bloomers whose retirement dates are nearing can still take steps to secure their financial futures.

• Pay down debts. Eliminating debt is good for men and women of all ages, but especially so for those nearing retirement. Substantial debt may delay your retirement and can greatly reduce your quality of life during retirement. If you still have substantial debt, eliminate that debt before you start saving additional money for retirement. Once your debt slate has been wiped clean, you can then increase your retirement contributions.

• Eliminate unnecessary expenses. If your retirement savings are low (many financial advisors now advise men and women that they will need at least 60 percent of their preretirement income each year they are retired), start cutting back on unnecessary expenses and reallocate that money toward retirement saving. Cutting out luxury items, such as vacations to exotic locales or country club memberships, is one way to save money. But don’t overlook the simpler ways to save, such as canceling your cable subscription or dining at home more often.

• Downsize your home. Many empty nesters downsize their homes as retirement nears, and doing so can help you save a substantial amount of money. If the kids no longer live at home or if you simply have more space than you will need after retirement, downsize to a smaller, less expensive home. Monitor the real estate market before you decide to downsize so you can be sure to get the best deal on your current home. Downsizing saves on monthly utility bills, property taxes and a host of additional expenses. Downsizing also means less maintenance, which gives you more time to pursue your hobbies upon retiring.

• Take on some additional work. While you may have long felt you would slowly wind down in the years immediately preceding retirement, taking on some additional work outside of your current job is a great way to save more for retirement and perhaps even lay the foundation for a post-retirement career. Workers over the age of 50 can be invaluable resources to startups or other businesses looking for executives who have been there, done that. Look for part-time jobs that seek such experience. Even if the initial jobs don’t bowl you over financially, part-time consultant work in retirement can make up for lost retirement savings and may even make your retirement years more fulfilling.

Men and women on the verge of retirement can take many steps to grow their retirement savings and make their golden years that much more enjoyable.

CAREER ▼

well your skillset applies to that field. A trial run, which can be conducted by volunteering with a nonprofit organization or through a part-time job or simply offering your services to a company free of charge in exchange for a chance to learn how the business operates, can shed light on the inner workings of a particular industry, showing you how things work behind the curtain. Testing the waters may reaffirm your belief that a certain line of work is for you, or it might send you back to the drawing board. Either way, it’s valuable experience that may reassure you that whatever decision you ultimately make is the right one.

• Don’t go it alone. Switching careers after 50 carries some risk, but it’s certainly a risk that many before you have been willing to take. If you know any people, be it a friend, family member or former or even current colleague, who has reinvented themselves professionally, then speak with these people and ask for any advice they might have. If you know you want out of your current career but aren’t quite sure of what you want to do next, those who have faced a similar fork in the road may be able to help you narrow down your options. The notion of changing careers is exciting, and you can expect your personal and professional confidantes to share your excitement and be willing to help you in any way they can.

Making a career change after 50 can be a risky yet ultimately rewarding move, especially for those men and women who take a thoughtful approach to finding their second careers.

Although many begin preparing for their retirement at an early age, others, because of circumstances, are not as fortunate. Yet, there is hope for those late bloomers that with careful planning and following proven financial steps, their financial futures will be secure.

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New friendships smooth transition after major move

Special to The Catholic Commentator

Moving to a new neighborhood, or even another region, can often be traumatic for senior citizens. Establishing new friendships is a way to help make the transition much more enjoyable and emotionally gratifying.

Downsizing and other life changes often find seniors leaving their comfort zones to move to new neighborhoods or regions of the country. It can be difficult to leave those comfort zones behind, especially when it means saying goodbye to close friends or family members. Establishing new social circles as a senior can be challenging. But with a little effort and the right attitude, seniors can meet new people and enjoy the excitement that comes with new friendships.

• Join a club. If you have a particular hobby or interest, rekindle it in your new location. Find a local gardening club, church-sponsored organization or fitness center where you can meet like-minded men and women. Ask the real estate agent who helped you relocate to make suggestions on where to find community information and read community notices in the local newspaper.

• Get a dog. Dogs make great companions inside of the house and also serve as an ice breaker when you are outdoors. Take plenty of walks and take advantage of opportunities for conversation when people come up to you to inquire about your dog. Explain your situation and you may make some new friends along the way.

• Volunteer your time. Many people make new friends through volunteering. Volunteer and you’re likely to meet people who share the same interests as you. Sign up with a favorite charity or volunteer at nonprofit events and look for familiar faces. Start talking to those people you meet again and again.

• Participate in church events. Places of religious worship are often cornerstones of a community, and they frequently host different events to get parishioners or members together. Read the bulletin and get involved in pot lucks, retreats, movie nights and other church-sponsored events.

• Work at a school. Schools also serve as hubs of community activity. Volunteer or work for a local school and you will soon find yourself immersed in your community’s weekday hustle and bustle. This is a great way to meet people and learn more about your new neighborhood in the process.

• Host your own party. Go out on a limb and plan a “new to the neighborhood” party. Put invitations in neighbors’ mailboxes and invite everyone over for snacks and cocktails. Remember, neighbors may be just as nervous about new faces as you are, and a party is a great way to break the ice.

Change can be hard for seniors starting out in new communities. With some gumption and a few strategies to get started, anyone can expand their circle of friends.

Simple and natural ways to lower blood pressure

Special to The Catholic Commentator

High blood pressure is a big problem. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, roughly one in three adults in the United States has high blood pressure. In Canada recently, slightly less than 18 percent of Canadians ages 12 and older reported being diagnosed with high blood pressure.

While such figures might be frightening, Johns Hopkins Medicine notes that there are some simple and natural ways for people to lower their high blood pressure.

• Opt for heart-healthy foods. Instead of foods that are high in sodium, eat a diet that is rich in whole grains, fruits, vegetables and lean proteins. Check labels before buying prepared foods at the grocery store, as many such foods are high in sodium.

• Look for foods that contain probiotics. Johns Hopkins Medicine notes that studies have linked foods that contain probiotics to healthy blood pressure. Probiotics are consumable live bacteria, and while studies regarding the relationship between probiotics and blood pressure
How to address frequent feelings of coldness

Special to The Catholic Commentator

As people age, many report feeling chilly even when the temperature outside is warm. Studies have shown that older people are more likely to have slightly colder body temperatures than their younger counterparts. Feeling cold can be the result of the natural aging process, or it may be symptomatic of a medical condition. Understanding the reasons behind chilliness can help people take proper action.

Aging adults can feel cold for various reasons. As people age, their metabolisms slow down, leading to decreased energy. During times of low energy output, one can feel cold. The American Geriatric Society Foundation for Health suggests that individuals with slower metabolisms may not produce enough heat from their own bodies to stay warm.

Circulation issues also may be a concern. As people age, the walls of their blood vessels may lose their elasticity, negatively affecting circulation as a result. Vasoreceptors also may no longer be as quick to direct blood vessels in order to constrict to keep body temperature up.

Inadequate fat storage may also be a contributor. Older people generally have less subcutaneous fat stores and muscle mass, both of which can insulate their bodies from cold weather. As a result, they may have trouble regulating body temperature. Exercise and healthy eating may help remedy this situation.

Certain medical conditions or medications may be to blame, too. SUNY Upstate Medical University offers that some drugs, like beta blockers, can decrease heart rate, which can reduce circulation to the extremities. High cholesterol levels can impair blood flow. Hypothyroidism, or an underperforming thyroid, also can affect a person’s ability to regulate body temperature. It’s imperative that people speak with their doctors to rule out any medical conditions or medication issues that may be contributing to their feelings of being cold.

The following are some additional steps aging men and women can take to stay warm.

- Make sure you are at a healthy weight for your gender and age.
- Get the cardiovascular system pumping by exercising more.
- Layer clothing until you feel comfortable so that you are not adjusting the thermostat as frequently.
- Wear a vest to keep your chest warm to prevent heat being drawn from the extremities. Often the body will sacrifice heat in the hands and feet to keep its core warm.
- Invest in wool socks and blankets, as wool will help wick away moisture from the body.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, each week women who are 65 years or older, are generally fit and have no limiting health conditions should combine at least two days of muscle-strengthening exercises with at least two hours and 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity.

Women capable of more strenuous cardiovascular activity can substitute one hour and 15 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity with their two and a half hours per week of more moderate-intensity exercise. The CDC notes that distinguishing between moderate-intensity exercise and vigorous-intensity exercise is pretty simple.

Women can use a 10-point scale in which sitting is zero and working as hard as is physically possible is 10. Moderate-intensity aerobic activity will make women breathe harder and elevate their heart rates, but should not make them feel completely drained at the end of a workout.

These activities will register as a five or six on the 10-point scale. Vigorous-intensity aerobic activity includes those exercises that women would deem a seven or eight on the 10-point scale. Such activities should elevate the heart rate considerably and get women breathing hard enough that they will be unable to say more than a few words without pausing to catch their breath. No two women are the same and age must be considered when developing a healthy exercise regimen.

Feeling cold is usually nothing out of the ordinary when a person gets older. Fortunately, there are ways that older men and women can stay warm.

Many senior citizens report that they feel chilly even when the weather is warm. There are several steps men and women can take to stay warm.
Many people are quick to think of growing older in a negative light. Although there certainly are some side effects of aging that one may wish to avoid, people may find that the benefits of growing older outweigh the negatives.

Seniors are a rapidly growing segment of the population. In the United States, the Administration on Aging states that the older population — persons 65 years or older — numbered 46.2 million in 2014 (the latest year for which data is available). Statistics Canada reports that, in July 2015, estimates indicated that there were more persons aged 65 years and older in Canada than children aged 0 to 14 years for the first time in the country’s history. Nearly one in six Canadians (16.1 percent) was at least 65 years old.

With so many people living longer, it’s time to celebrate the perks of getting older rather than the drawbacks. Here are some great benefits to growing old.

• Higher self-esteem: The insecurities of youth give way as one ages, and older people have less negativity and higher self-esteem. A University of Basel study of people ranging in ages from 18 to 89 found that regardless of demographic and social status, the older one gets the higher self-esteem climbs. Qualities like self-control and altruism can contribute to happiness.
• Financial perks: Seniors are entitled to discounts on meals, museum entry fees, movies and other entertainment if they’re willing to disclose their ages. Discounts are available through an array of venues if one speaks up. Seniors also can enjoy travel perks, with slashed prices on resorts, plane tickets and more. The U.S. National Park Service offers citizens age 62 and older lifetime passes to more than 2,000 federal recreation sites for just $10 in person ($20 online or via mail).
Proper planning allows retirees to punch their passports

Special to The Catholic Commentator

Though a transient lifestyle is something few people aspire to during much of their lives, come retirement, the idea of staying in a place for only a short time has more appeal. According to a recent study from the Transamerica Center for Retirement Studies, 36 percent of baby boomers want to spend their retirements traveling. Many are succeeding in doing just that, as a study from the luxury travel network Virtuoso found that today’s seniors spent an average of just more than $11,000 per year on travel. That was more than any other generation, highlighting just how much older adults like to get out and explore the world.

Retirees who fear they cannot afford to travel can explore the various ways for seniors to cut costs and still satisfy their wanderlust during retirement.

1. Take advantage of age-related discounts.

Some adults prefer to hide their ages, but when it comes time to travel during retirement, honesty is the best policy. Many businesses that cater to travelers offer discounts to seniors. Car rental agencies, hotels, travel agencies and cruise lines may offer direct discounts to customers 65 and older, while membership in organizations such as AAA and AARP may make seniors eligible for additional discounts. Discounts on lodging and airfare might net the biggest savings, but even discounts on various smaller expenses can add up to big savings.

2. Don’t overlook travel agencies.

While many prospective travelers’ first instincts are now to visit various travel websites in an effort to find the most affordable trips, it’s important that travelers not overlook travel agencies when planning trips. Travel websites, though a valuable resource, only list the hotels and airlines that agree to be included on their sites. While many participate, some do not, and those that do may instead work independent of travel websites or partner with travel agencies. Travel agencies have access to the latest information, and many specialize in certain countries, knowing all the attractions visitors to their countries want to see. Travel agencies may offer packages that include admissions to popular attractions, which can be more affordable than planning a trip a la carte.

3. Travel as part of a group.

Group travel may not appeal to everyone, but it should appeal to older, budget-conscious travelers. Retirees who are uncomfortable driving at home will likely be even less comfortable driving in foreign countries where the rules of the road are not the same. Traveling in groups, whether it’s with a retirement community, religious organization or another program, can save travelers substantial amounts of money. Many hotels and tour operators offer steep discounts for group tours, which can even be arranged through travel agencies. A hidden benefit of signing up for a group tour is the chance to meet new people and develop new relationships with fellow globetrotters.

Many working professionals hope to spend the bulk of their retirement traveling the globe. While such a goal is potentially costly, there are various ways to save and still see the world.

BENEFITS

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• Reasoning and problem-solving skills: Brain scans reveal that older adults are more likely to use both hemispheres of their brains simultaneously — something called bilaterization. This can sharpen reasoning skills. For example, in a University of Illinois study, older air traffic controllers excelled at their cognitively taxing jobs, despite some losses in short-term memory and visual spatial processing. Older controllers proved to be experts at navigating, juggling multiple aircrafts simultaneously and avoiding collisions.

• Less stress: As people grow older, they are able to differentiate their needs from wants and focus on more important goals. This can alleviate worry over things that are beyond one’s control. Seniors may realize how little the opinions of others truly mean in the larger picture, thereby feeling less stress about what others think of them.

Growing older may involve gray hair or wrinkling skin, but there are many positive things associated with aging.
to lead to a dementia diagnosis. Dementia can affect thinking and social abilities, but the Mayo Clinic notes that some dementias may be reversible. The following are some common symptoms of dementia:

- Trouble communicating or finding words.
- Difficulty completing complex tasks.
- Challenges with planning and organization.
- Episodes of confusion and disorientation.
- Memory loss, which is often noticed by a third party.
- Personality changes that can include agitation, anxiety, inappropriate behavior and even hallucinations.

Apart from Alzheimer’s disease, which is a progressive disorder most common in people age 65 and older, there are other types of dementia. The second most common is called “vascular dementia.” This results from damage to vessels that supply blood to the brain. This damage can be the result of stroke, smoking and other blood vessel conditions. Brain imaging can often detect blood vessel problems implicated in vascular dementia.

Dementia with Lewy bodies, or DLB, is another dementia that laymen may mistake for Alzheimer’s disease. The Alzheimer’s Association notes that people with DLB often have not only memory loss and cognitive problems common in Alzheimer’s, but they also display initial or early symptoms such as sleep disturbances, well-formed visual hallucinations, slowness, gait imbalance or other Parkinsonian movement features, which can lead to misdiagnosis.

If physicians suspect dementia was caused by various factors, a person may be diagnosed with mixed dementia.

Unfortunately, there are no cures for progressive dementias that are linked to plaque tangles in the brain and changes in the way the brain processes the protein alpha-synuclein. Patience and various medications may be needed to help those with dementia live fuller lives. Cholinesterase inhibitors are mainstays in dementia treatment. These medications prevent the breakdown of acetylcholine, a chemical messenger important for learning and memory. Acetylcholine supports communication among nerve cells by keeping acetylcholine levels high. Physical therapy and cognitive therapy may be used in conjunction with medication to assist those with various dementias.

Helping individuals with dementia remain comfortable is a priority for caregivers, and understanding the symptoms and treatments can help caregivers make patients and loved ones as comfortable as possible.
Simplifying daily tasks important for seniors

Special to The Catholic Commentator

The ability to perform everyday tasks is something many people take for granted. But as men and women approach or exceed retirement age, many may start to struggle with chores and tasks they have performed for decades.

Physical limitations are a common side effect of aging. But such limitations do not have to prove too big a hurdle for seniors to clear. In fact, there are many ways for seniors to simplify everyday tasks while maintaining their independence.

• Embrace technology. Even the proudest Luddites cannot deny technology’s potential to make seniors’ lives easier. Seemingly simple tasks like shopping for groceries and vacuuming a home can be difficult for seniors with dwindling or limited mobility. But seniors with Internet access in their homes can order their groceries online and then pick them up in-store or have them delivered, saving them the trouble of walking around the store. With regard to vacuuming, autonomous vacuum cleaners have removed the need to use traditional vacuum cleaners. Certain autonomous vacuums employ sensors to detect dirty spots on the floor, and these vacuums can even be programmed to clean the home while residents are out of the house.

• Upgrade bathrooms. Tasks associated with personal hygiene also tend to be taken for granted until they become difficult. But a few simple bathroom alterations can help seniors safely navigate the bathrooms in their homes so they can maintain their personal hygiene without fear of injury. Grab bars can be installed on shower walls so seniors can safely get in and out of their showers and bathtubs. Such bars are both effective and inexpensive, and some do not even require any drilling to install. Specialty grab bars, tub grips and tub transfer benches are just a few additional products that can make bathing easier for seniors who have lost or are starting to lose some of their physical strength.

• Get “smart” on the road. Seniors who are experiencing mild difficulty driving can make getting about town that much easier by plugging their smartphones into their vehicles or making use of the various apps that have become standard in modern vehicles. For example, the maps app on a smartphone can be connected to a car and direct seniors to their destinations, saving them the trouble of remembering all the ins and outs of how to get to a particular destination. Seniors also can employ apps to help them find their vehicles should they forget exactly where they parked in crowded parking lots. Such apps can increase seniors’ comfort levels on the road while helping them maintain their independence.

• Downsize. Whether downsizing to a smaller home or simply downsizing a lifestyle, seniors may find that living smaller is akin to living simpler. Empty nesters may find they no longer need several bedrooms in their homes, and moving into smaller homes can reduce their daily workloads while also clearing out clutter that can make performing everyday chores more difficult. Men and women accustomed to hustle and bustle may also find that cutting back on professional and/or personal commitments gives them more energy for everyday activities while enriching the commitments they continue to maintain.

Aging men and women may find that technology helps them simplify their everyday lives.
Grandparent-grandchild relationships healthy for senior citizens

Special to The Catholic Commentator

In the not-so-distant past, extended families were the norm, with multiple generations residing on the same street if not in the same house.

Today the family unit is largely an amalgam of different situations. The rise of two-income families has pressured parents into finding childcare situations. Quite often grandparents once again step in to offer guidance and support for youngsters. This can be a good thing for both the grandparents and the grandchildren.

Although a bevy of psychological research focuses on parent-child relationships, new evidence points to the benefits of the grandchild-grandparent relationship as well. Close relationships between these different demographics is often a sign of strong familial ties.

A study from researchers at Boston College discovered that emotionally close ties between grandparents and adult grandchildren reduced depressive symptoms in both groups. Research at the University of Oxford among English children from ages 11 to 16 found that close grandparent-grandchild relationships were associated with benefits including fewer emotional and behavioral problems and fewer difficulties with peers.

Adult and grandchildren alike benefit from relationships with their elders. Grandparents can provide a connection and exposure to different ideas while providing a link to family history and knowledge regarding traditions and customs not readily available elsewhere.

Nurturing grandparent-grandchild experiences may be easy for families where grandparents live in the same house or close by. For others, it may take some effort. The following are some ways to facilitate time spent together.

- Schedule regular family reunions or get-togethers. Host or plan multi-generational events that bring the family together and expose children to various members of their family.
- Promote one-on-one time. Have grandchildren spend time with grandparents in intimate settings. Alone time can be good for both and offers each undivided attention. A meal at a restaurant or time spent doing a puzzle or craft can be interesting to both generations involved.
- Video chat when possible. If distance makes frequent visits challenging, use technology to bridge that gap. Send photos, letters and electronic communications. Tech-savvy grandparents can use Skype or Facetime to stay in touch and speak one-on-one with their grandchildren.
- Share skills with each other. Either generation can play teacher to the other. Grandparents may have certain skills, such as baking, sewing or wood crafts, they can impart that may not be readily taught today. Children can help grandparents navigate computers, video games or sports activities. Grandchildren can help grandparents feel younger, and grandchildren can learn new experiences from their grandparents.

• Lose weight. People with high blood pressure who are carrying a few extra pounds should know that research indicates extra weight can cause injury to the heart. Dropping those pounds, especially through physical activity that can boost heart health, can help men and women lower their blood pressure.

NATURAL ▼
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are ongoing, researchers believe probiotics may produce chemicals that, when absorbed in the blood stream, may activate receptors in the blood vessels to lower blood pressure.

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