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HOW DO I KNOW IF MY FAMILY MEMBER OR LOVED ONE CAN NO LONGER LIVE AT HOME AND IT IS TIME TO MOVE INTO ASSISTED LIVING?

Usually, families and seniors begin to consider alternatives when it becomes difficult for the elderly family member to carry on with important activities of daily living without support and assistance from others. There are many variables and each situation is unique.

Here are a few common reasons for which a decision to move into assisted living is made:

- If the senior lives far from family, moving into assisted living may make sense simply to head off potentially dangerous isolation during a worst-case scenario, such as an earthquake, flood, or power outage of several days due to a weather event.
- A physician prescribes a move into assisted living upon determining that the senior cannot be left unattended due to a health condition requiring frequent or constant monitoring.
- Poor balance, dizziness, bad joints, and weak bones are putting the senior at high risk a fall injury. An environment constructed to minimize risk of falls and help with walking may become essential to prevent injury.
- An increase in certain "special care needs" such as wandering, incontinence, sleeplessness, tube feeding, combative and other difficult dementia behavior, assistance with transferring such as moving from a chair to the bed, or chronic need for skin care treatments.
- Memory loss and forgetfulness, especially when Alzheimer's disease or dementia is diagnosed, becomes dangerous. The senior may forget they have food cooking on the stove, they may forget to eat, or they may forget to take medication or accidentally double dose on medication.
- Loneliness had led to depression resulting loss of motivation for activity and personal care. Living in an assisted living community can alleviate loneliness.
- The senior can no longer attend adult day care, requiring the family to provide care around the clock.
- A medical crisis or hospitalization requires a period of rehabilitation.
- A decline in the physical health of the caregiver spouse or other family member.

Some red flags that indicate that it may be time for a move to assisted living:

- Unpaid bills lying around, possibly due to any of a number of reasons, including cognitive impairment, fatigue, or depression.
 - It is especially important to be sure the senior is paying insurance bills.

- Watch for thank-you messages from charities, especially ones asking for more money. Scam charities, and even some otherwise reputable charities, prey on older adults who have lost some cognitive function that used to enable them to be fiscally prudent. They may even forget how many times they have donated to a particular charity, donating repeatedly over a relatively short period of time.
- Accumulation of unread magazines indicating fatigue or a loss of cognitive function.
- Spoiled food in the refrigerator.
- Unexplained weight loss, perhaps due to inability to prepare meals or do grocery shopping.
- Unexplained weight gain, possibly due to an injury slowing the person down, general frailty, diabetes, or dementia where the senior doesn't remember eating and indulges in meals and snacks, or perhaps even money troubles that limit food choices to bread and pasta.
- You discover that your parent is covering up a bruise from a fall that he or she doesn't want you to see or know about.
- Disheveled appearance that may include unbrushed teeth, unwashed hair, misapplied makeup, wearing the same clothes all the time, leaving button holes left unbuttoned, and uncharacteristic facial hair or forgetting to shave.
- Vision has deteriorated to the point where ability to navigate within the household is impaired or there is a dangerous likelihood of errors in taking medications.
- Dirty kitchen with stale, expired, or spoiled food. Also, multiples of the same item like cereal or ketchup may reveal that the senior, while grocery shopping, is forgetting what they have in stock at home.
- Smell of smoke, a discarded pot or pan, or other sign of a cooking accident or kitchen fire.
- Dirty bathroom.
- Household clutter and unlaundered clothes.
- Untended lawn and plants.
- Unexplained dent or damaged bumper on the car.
- Entrance door left unlocked or open.
- Frequent complaints of loneliness or depression. Be mindful that when a friend has stopped visiting due to health problems or death, the senior may not only become lonely or depressed, but they also become more vulnerable to many other problems that otherwise would have been noticed and corrected.
- Chronic sleep loss.
- Uncharacteristic mood swings, or combative and other difficult dementia behavior.
- Medical scares happening with increasing frequency and/or slow recovery from medical problems.
- Missed appointments, dropping out of a club, missing social events, no longer taking an evening walk, not visiting the library anymore, etc.