

Getting Adjusted

Whatever choices you and your elderly loved one or patient make about their living arrangements, the changes will involve an adjustment period. Moving to a retirement community, assisted living facility or nursing home will mean giving up a familiar home for a new, strange one. Even entering a day care program or bringing in home care help means changing habits and routines and meeting new people. What are the best ways to get adjusted to these new lifestyles? How can you help your elder accept the changes and enter a new phase of their life?

Take It Slow

It usually works best to introduce new habits or lifestyles gradually. This may mean visiting the assisted living facility several times to eat meals, talk with the residents, walk the grounds; or attending several sessions of a day care program with your elder until he or she feels more at ease. A slow introduction to the new life will help make the transition easier and make them happier than a hurried one. In fact, a slow introduction will save time and effort later, since it will head off potential problems.

Family and Friends

Just because the senior is changing their lifestyle does not mean family and friends have to take a backseat. In fact, now is the time for family and friends to provide all the support they can muster. Visits, phone calls, and letters all provide a sense of comfort and security when everything is changing. As a caregiver, you can notify a network of family and friends about moves and other changes in routine, letting them know when and how they can contact the senior and the ways that they might help to ease the transition.

Mix the Old with the New

Especially when the changes involve a move, make sure to bring along plenty of pieces of the person's old life—a favorite lamp, a gift from a far away friend, photos, clocks, bedding and other personal items. Some communities also allow pets, which can be some of a senior's closest friends. Bringing along parts of a life before the move will not only remind him or her of that life, but will also create a continuous sense of self, and can greatly increase the senior's well-being.

New Friends

One of the best things about these changes is that the senior will have the opportunity to meet new people and new friends. Meeting new people can give the senior a fresh outlook—making the disruptions and changes easier to take. Although it may be difficult for them at first, encourage your elder to try to socialize, participate in activities and meet new people.



TIPS:

- ✓ If certain personal belongings must be left behind, ask the care recipient whom he or she would like to give them to. Then, when the person asks where this or that item is, you can offer a gentle reminder, "Remember, you gave that to JoAnna for safekeeping."
- ✓ When transitioning, it can be helpful if one or two close relatives sleep over for the first two or three nights. This makes going to bed and waking up in a strange place less frightening and allows the person to adjust to the new environment.