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# Seniors' Abilities Guide Care Choices

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Right at Home

One of the most important decisions people can make in planning for the future is about the care and assistance they will need as they age. The growth in the senior care industry has provided people with many more options to live the lifestyle they choose, including the ability to remain safe and comfortable in their own homes.

Today, people are living longer and healthier and the senior care industry is changing in response to that trend. While not all seniors require the intensive supervision and skilled medical care of a nursing home setting, many can use assistance with one or more activities of daily living to retain their independence. Some seniors shy away from asking for help because they do not realize there are options that do not require them to leave their home.

The National Center for Health Statistics defines activities of daily living as those related to personal care, such as dressing, bathing or showering, getting in and out of bed and eating. Instrumental activities of daily living, a more detailed measurement, describe more intensive activities related to independent living including meal preparation, shopping for groceries, paying bills and light housework. Studies have indicated that approximately 20 percent of the elderly population has difficulty with one or more of these activities.

An honest assessment by a family member or a senior care professional of how well a senior is able to complete these activities of daily living is a good indicator of the amount of assistance he or she requires. In-home or community-based services are viable options for those who have difficulty with a handful of these tasks, but don't require round-the-clock supervision.

Seniors and their families should evaluate their abilities in the following areas as a first step in determining if additional supportive care is needed:

- Living area: Is it unkempt or cluttered?
- Diet and nutrition: Is there a concern the senior is not eating properly? Are they able to get to the grocery store on a regular basis?
- Medication: Is it being taken as prescribed? Are doctors' appointments being missed or rescheduled?
- Personal Hygiene: Is there a decline in personal hygiene of the senior?
- Memory: Are there signs of confusion or short-term memory loss?
- Driving: Are there signs of diminished driving ability?

While these signs are a cause for concern, they don't necessarily mean a senior is nursing home-bound. However, they can indicate that assistance is needed to ensure the safety and continued well-being of the senior. If a family notices any of these signs, they should consult with a senior care expert to discuss services that are available.