Support for Older People:
A Manual for Promoting Health
This Manual has been designed for a general audience; however, some of the resources provided are specific to the state of Wisconsin.

**NOTICE**

This is an information gathering and resource Manual to be used in conjunction with a Primary Health Care Provider (PCP) or specialist. It is not intended for diagnosis, treatment or as a substitute for medical advice.

Before starting a diet or exercise plan consult with a health care professional.

*In case of emergency, call 911.*

Why should I bother with this Manual? I have enough to do!
The information in this Manual is designed to help you support older adults to remain home. This manual is designed to help you find information very quickly. It should only take you a few minutes to find the information you are looking for.

Shouldn’t I just call an ambulance for medical problems?
*You should always call an ambulance for a medical emergency. This Manual is never to be used in a medical emergency.* It is to help you provide useful information to PCPs so that the people you support will receive a timely diagnosis and the best possible treatment.
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A My Health Passport:  
Information to bring to appointments with health care providers to help with communication

B Medication Information Form  
Information to bring to appointments with health care providers to track medication

C What is a Blood Test?  
A visual aid to prepare individuals for a blood draw

D Hospital Admissions Checklists

E Fitting Footwear:  
A manual on how to properly fit shoes in order to avoid foot problems

Please note that electronic copies of all the Information Gathering Worksheets can be accessed at:  
https://uwmadison.box.com/v/olderadultworksheets
How to use this Manual

Getting to know the Manual:

Explore the Table of Contents
- Read the Introduction.
- **Understand that this Manual is not to be used for emergency situations.** This is to be used to help you understand issues that are common in older adults and to prepare you to find help as health issues arise.

Read Chapters 1 to 4
- Read these chapters and then come back to them as specific health issues arise with the person you are taking care of.

Browse Chapters 5 and 6
- Look at the list of symptoms in the Table of Contents. Think about symptoms you might have seen in yourself or the person you are taking care of. You can come back to this chapter for tips on what to do when you see a symptom. Now think about which conditions are relevant to the person you care for. Read those sections (Chapter 6) carefully.

Browse the Resources Chapter
- Make a list of the things that would be helpful to you right now. Come back to this chapter as needed for your situation.

Look at the Appendix
- Is there anything here that is helpful to you now? If yes, make a copy. If not, remember these resources in case they might be helpful later.

When a person exhibits a symptom:
- If this is an emergency, use the correct emergency procedures for where you live.

If this is not an emergency:
- Read about symptom(s) in Chapter 6.
- Make a copy of the relevant Information Gathering Worksheet.
- Make sure information goes with the person taking the person to his/her next health care appointment.
When a person is diagnosed with a condition:

- Read about the condition and any related conditions and/or symptoms. Ask the person’s Primary Care Providers any questions you have.

**Normal changes as a person ages**

People are living longer than ever before. Advances in medical technology, social support and health care programs have increased life expectancy. Consequently, it is now common for people to live well into old age.

**Where older people live**

As people age, they usually remain in their home as long as they are able, often with support from health and community services and family members. Advancing age brings with it a variety of health concerns, in addition to any disability already present. Aging is accompanied by predictable changes in physical functioning and general resilience. Some conditions can be prevented. Others cannot be prevented but can be treated, resulting in better overall health and better quality of life.

**Challenges for providing care to older adults**

Family members often feel unprepared to support their loved ones as they develop health conditions. Finding the right resources to help sort out the problem, altering house routines to accommodate changes, managing treatments and providing the most effective support and supervision for people with health conditions is often challenging. Some health conditions can be difficult to manage. Handling multiple medical appointments and understanding the condition and treatment side effects are all issues that family members as caregivers may feel unprepared for. As a consequence, people can be prematurely relocated to nursing homes, resulting in loss of important relationships and likely diminishing quality of life.

**What can caregivers do?**

Caregivers play a crucial role in supporting persons to age in place. Another important role that caregivers can play is making certain that Primary Care Providers (PCPs) have the information they need to make the correct diagnosis and begin treatment.

**Using this Manual**

This Manual is intended to help caregivers support people as they age. It provides tools to help caregivers to understand common symptoms and conditions and will help caregivers to communicate with health care professionals, to advocate for care and to comfort the older adult, to keep older people active despite the development of health conditions, to prevent disability and discomfort and to keep older people in their own home as long as possible.

Another helpful resource from the University of Wisconsin-Madison: [https://agefully.me](https://agefully.me)
Normal Changes
as a Person Ages
Normal aging

Many changes occur as part of the normal aging process. These changes occur at different rates for different people. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish normal aging from illness. Sometimes illness is misinterpreted as normal aging, causing delays in identification and treatment of illness and leading to unnecessary suffering. A major and unfortunately common mistake is to assume that things such as vision loss, diminished hearing and other conditions are ‘just aging.’ This prevents people from getting the treatment they need and undermines their quality of life. Changes should always be considered treatable until proven otherwise.

Vision

Normal vision: How the eye works

The cornea is the outermost layer of the eye. It is a transparent window that allows light to enter the eye. The pupil, which is behind the cornea, controls the amount of light coming into the eye. In bright sun, the pupil narrows to limit the amount of light. In darker settings, the pupil dilates to let more light in. You have probably noticed that it takes time to adjust to both dark and very bright settings. This adjustment is your pupil responding to different levels of light. Without this, it would be difficult to see in darkened rooms or in bright light.

The lens is a clear oval shaped section of the eye. The lens is what allows you to see both near and distant objects clearly. The lens actually changes its shape to bring objects at different distances into focus, like a camera. Light passes through the lens to the back of the eye. Once the light passes to the back of the eye, it is sent through nerves to the brain. This results in vision.

The aging eye

As people age, several things happen that make vision more difficult. The pupil becomes less able to change size to accommodate changes in light and dark. Consequently, older people may have difficulty adjusting to changes in light. You may have seen older people hesitate as they move between dark and light areas. This also means that bright lights can cause blinding glare, which can be dangerous. The best type of lighting for aging eyes is indirect (lamps with shades).

The lens also changes with age. It becomes less able to change shape making it difficult to focus. Many older people have ‘far sightedness’ or presbyopia. This means that they can see...
Fatigue

Fatigue is a feeling of tiredness, lack of energy or exhaustion. Fatigue is different from Weakness, which is a lack of physical strength. While occasional fatigue is common in older adults, continued fatigue may interrupt daily activities and could be a warning sign of a serious health condition. Sometimes fatigue is obvious. Sometimes it’s not so easy to identify. For example, fatigue can also appear as:

- Inability to concentrate.
- Irritability.
- Resistance/agitation.
- Lack of appetite.
- Depression.
- Withdrawal from social activities.

What are possible causes of fatigue?

Mild fatigue may be caused by lack of sleep, lack of exercise and boredom or can be a side effect of many medications. Persistent fatigue can be a symptom of more serious physical or mental health problems. The underlying problem can be treated and the fatigue can be reversed. Possible causes of fatigue include:

- Depression.
- Diabetes.
- Infections.
- High or low thyroid hormone levels (Hyper- or hypothyroidism).
- Stressful emotional situations.
- Sleep disorders.
- Heart problems.
- Low number of red blood cells (anemia).
- Kidney problems (renal failure).
- Bladder or bowel problems.
- Lack of certain vitamins/minerals.

What should I do if I am noticing fatigue in a person?

One of the most important things you can do is to collect information and document your observations. This can assist the PCP to find the source of the fatigue and treat the problem as quickly as possible. An Information Gathering Worksheet is found at the end of this section. Please complete the worksheet with input from the person you take care of and with the information you have.

- If the fatigue has already been assessed by the PCP in the past and there is no change, bring the worksheet to the person’s PCP and discuss options for managing fatigue at home.
• If the fatigue is new, increased in frequency, or has not been assessed by a medical professional, please notify the person’s PCP and bring the worksheet to the person’s next appointment.

Who can I call for help after the PCP?
Aging and Disability Resource Center (see Resources section of this Manual)

What are my resources?
Fatigue. Medline Plus.
https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003088.htm

https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000064.htm

Fatigue. AARP Health Tools.
http://healthtools.aarp.org/symptom/fatigue
• Outlines causes, symptoms, and what to expect at a PCP visit and home care.

Related sections of Manual
• Obesity
• Heart Disease
• Depression
• Arthritis
• Sleep Problems
# Information Gathering Worksheet: Fatigue

If a person is showing any signs of fatigue (see previous page), please complete this worksheet to assist with information gathering in order to present helpful data to the medical practitioner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information to Collect</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>Observations: Also ask anyone else who may have information (such as staff on other shifts or family members)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is fatigue unusual for this person? If not unusual, is it happening more often or becoming more severe?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When did you first notice the fatigue?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was there something that occurred outside of the person’s regular routine such as a visitor, new person, an examination procedure or unusual weather that may have affected comfort or sleep patterns?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What types of activities does the person usually participate in during the week? Has this changed lately?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the person complained of pain recently or reacted negatively to being touched? Can the person tell you where the pain is located?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the person recently complained of headaches?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the person recently complained about being dizzy or feeling faint?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does this person usually eat during the day? Has the person’s appetite, thirst or diet changed recently?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the person sleeping as well as usual? Or sleeping more than usual? Or only able to sleep in certain positions?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the person become breathless or have any difficulty catching his/her breath? If yes, what is he/she usually doing when this happens?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent weight loss or gain?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowel or bladder problems such as loose stools, pain or less/more frequent elimination?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Information Gathering Worksheet: Fatigue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information to Collect</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mood changes? Is the person acting sad or depressed?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fever or night sweating (sheets and bed clothes may be damp in the morning)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vomiting or complaints of nausea (stomach ache), heartburn or gas (burping)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent cough? Does the cough occur more when the person is laying down or sitting up?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion or difficulty remembering things?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider tracking this person’s sleep patterns Over one week, including:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Wake time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nap time(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bed time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Times awake during the night</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report any changes here.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**next steps**

Person Name:  
Caregivers Name(s):  
Date:  
Action(s):