



January 2009



Linda Fodrini-Johnson, MA, MFT, CMC is the Founder and Executive Director of Eldercare Services and is a Fellow and President Elect of the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers.

## Sensory Changes Affect Quality of Life

January is National Glaucoma Awareness Month. We experience the world through our senses. When one or more of them is affected by disease, accidents or the aging process, it diminishes one's ability to function at optimal levels. As one ages, the loss of hearing or sight might contribute to isolation and/or depression.

The aging process causes some changes in vision such as a yellowing of the lenses which causes a decrease in color discrimination and depth perception. Presbyopia is the inability of the lens to focus sharply on nearby objects. Resulting from the loss of elasticity of the lens, it causes the majority of us to wear magnification glasses after age 40.

Another common age related change in the eye is difficulty with light/dark adaptation. This is the reason many seniors decide not to drive at night or go into a darkened movie theater during the day. To see well, Elders need about 3 times as much light as 20 year olds.

Disease and accidents can lead to blindness. Many individuals suffer from macular degeneration but should be aware there are new treatments for the "wet type" of this condition. Glaucoma is a silent and often undetected disease of the eye that can lead to blindness.

Vision should be checked at least every two years and more often for

those with diagnosed conditions. Those with a dementia should not ignore having vision tested – poor vision can contribute to increased confusion or safety hazards.

Hearing is also important to our safety and well being as well as quality of life. About 10% of those over 65, and 25% of those over 75, have hearing loss that interferes with daily activities. All hearing losses should be evaluated as it may be the build up of earwax, which can be removed to improve hearing.

Throughout life, we lose taste buds mostly by burning the tongue with hot food. A loss in the ability to smell and taste can reduce appetite and lead to malnutrition and weight loss or cause individuals to over salt or sugar foods leading to other health issues.

Touch and pain sensitivity can be part of the aging process or related to chronic aging related illnesses such as arthritis, Parkinson's disease or stroke. A decreased response to pain can lead to severe burns or other problems associated with slowed blood circulation as well as decreased heat-producing activities of the body.

Individuals should have senses evaluated at least once every two years and more frequently if diagnosed with a condition that warrants monitoring. Those who live alone might be at a higher risk for accidents related to sensory changes and should have a system that they create, an emergency response system and working fire/

smoke detectors in their homes.

There are many new inventions to assist those with hearing and vision loss, most notably the free communication devices provided by local telephone companies. For more information or to obtain an application call our office for yourself or a client. Seeing, hearing and helper dogs are also available to serve those with sensory changes.

Eldercare Services' Care Managers survey for sensory changes in initial evaluations with all clients. They will make recommendations to increase the quality of life and ensure safety and well being for those who want to stay in their own homes. We also have stand-alone safety evaluation services delivered by a Professional Geriatric Care Manager.

Changes are being made by creative companies to enhance life for individuals with sensory changes. We stay on top of new ideas and inventions to bring the highest quality of life to our clients.

**Sensory Check List**

1. Check hearing & vision at least every 2 years
2. Be conscious of eating habits
3. See a doctor about increased or decreased pain sensation
4. Contact a Professional Geriatric Care Manager about tools to assist with sensory loss

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### *Community Classes*

#### **The Sandwich Generation: Families Stuck Between Caring for Children and Aging Parents**

**Sunday, January 11, 2009 from 3 to 5 PM**

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church**

**1601 Mary Dr., Pleasant Hill, CA**

**Walnut Creek**

#### **Families Dealing with Dementia**

**Friday, January 16, 2009 from 9 AM to Noon**

#### **Dementia: Middle of the Road**

**Tuesday, February 10, 2009 from 6 to 8:30 PM**

#### **Preparing for Positive Long Lives**

**Saturday, March 7, 2009 from 9:30 AM to Noon**

**Class Registration: Please call at least 3 days ahead**

### *Support Groups*

When concerns for aging family members are part of every day life, or when they interfere with work, your health or other relationships, you need to join a support group.

#### **Caring for An Aging Family Member**

**2nd Thursday of every month from 7 to 8:30 PM**

1808 Tice Valley Blvd., Walnut Creek, CA 94595

**1st Tuesday of every month from 6 to 7:30 PM**

605 A Chenery St., San Francisco, CA 94131

**Cost for Support Groups and Classes: None**

**Support Group Registration: Not required**

For more information regarding classes and support groups, please call (925) 937-2018, (415) 469-8300 or email us at

**info@EldercareAnswers.com**

Eldercare Services has offices in Marin, San Francisco and Walnut Creek, CA.

Visit us on the web at <http://www.EldercareAnswers.com> for more information.