

Your aging parents ? what to look for during your holiday visit

The holiday season ? that special time of year when families get together. Though holiday family time is intended to be festive, adult children may notice some disturbing changes in their aging parents ? especially when they haven't seen their parents in a while.

Forgetfulness, poor eating habits, depression, mobility challenges, and lack of proper hygiene are just a few of the unfortunate changes that can occur as our loved ones age. When adult children notice these changes in their aging parents, it can be a shock.

Seniors' organizations such as CHATS ? Community & Home Assistance to Seniors exist to address these changes and challenges, both for seniors and their family caregivers. Organizations like CHATS are essential in supporting the health, wellness and independence of seniors, and also in meeting the practical and emotional needs of family caregivers.

When you are visiting with your aging parents this holiday season, keep an eye out for the following:

? How is their appetite? Any weight changes? Can they feed themselves properly? Can they prepare something to eat if they are hungry?

? How is their appearance and grooming? Do they look and smell ?clean??

? How is their mobility? Do they have difficulty walking, getting in and out of chairs, navigating stairs? How is their balance?

? Do they have irregular sleeping habits?

? How is their driving ability?

? Do they seem forgetful or confused? Mood swings?

? Have they ceased social activity? Have they lost interest in their hobbies? Do they seem lonely or isolated?

? Can they hear the telephone or the doorbell? How is their vision?

? If you are visiting them at their home, is there an unusual degree of mess or clutter in their home? Is there outdated/spoiled food in the fridge? Are the rooms, halls and stairs well-lit? Is there a large amount of unopened mail or late-payment notices?

If your holiday visit merits concern about your aging parent, it's time to think about putting a plan in place. Talk to your parent about ways to enhance their quality of life. Determine their needs and their wants, and seek out resources to address them.

Three good places to start are 211 (dial 211 or go to www.211ontario.ca), Doorways to Care (1-866-626-0222), and www.centralhealthline.ca. These services all link you to community health services.

For more information about CHATS, go to www.chats.on.ca or call 905-713-6596, or toll-free 1-877-452-4287.