

## ***Evaluating a senior's lifestyle: Thoughts on what living independently really means.***

Many seniors continue to live in their own homes well into their 80's and 90's and seem to manage reasonably well. But are they really living "independently" and what does their quality of life look like? Often many remain in their home only because their children, relative or neighbor are able to provide adequate support to fill some of the gaps that have appeared as a result of aging and health changes. Family members may be performing home maintenance tasks, cleaning, perhaps providing transportation if their loved one no longer drives.

I like to remind both seniors and their children that it rarely happens that one day you're able to do a broad range of things and the next day you're unable to accomplish many of those same tasks. Life is a series of adjustments that often happen slowly, which allows us to mentally adjust our mind set to our new reality.

But what if we didn't have to make quite so many sacrifices? What if through a change in our living situation we could actually regain the ability to enjoy many of the same things we thought we'd given up forever? Many organizations that serve seniors, including doctors and other health professionals, encourage older adults and their caregivers to continually evaluate the home environment and the senior's physical limitations to ensure their safety in that setting.

From our perspective, we hope that more families take the evaluation a step further and assess not only their safety, but also the quality of life their loved one is experiencing. I've heard many stories of seniors who moved into retirement communities and pretty quickly came to the realization that they're living more independently now than they had been in their own

home. They discover what many have before them, that independence is really about having choices.

As we age we all begin to make small accommodations to address physical changes whether they are imposed on us by diseases such as diabetes, loss of vision or arthritis or are a result of injury or rehabilitation after surgery. We may no longer take long walks in the neighborhood, perhaps feeling unsteady on our feet. When driving is no longer a pleasant experience, it is common to stop driving at night first then slowly give it up altogether. While family can step in for grocery shopping or chauffeuring to church, other routine activities like going to a health club, to choir practice, to a quilting group or periodic trips to the library become things of the past.

Seniors who still have a spouse find that they lean on each other for companionship more than ever. Yet, each can experience the loss of spending time with friends if getting out and about is a problem. Those living alone can find themselves even more isolated. Time spent with family can easily become dominated by chores - what has to be done - and not about having some fun. This is a very common experience of aging in America. We make small changes to get by and realize one day that the lifestyle we are living is not exactly how we really want to live.

Not everyone considers a senior community as a viable option for them. But understand that just because an older adult lives in their home, it does not mean that they are actually living independently. Seeing the reality of an older adult's living situation allows you to see the possibilities of how quality of life can be improved. And then you can better understand whether a senior community - with the many conveniences

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available, social opportunities, assisted living services and comfortable lifestyle really is a good option.

If your loved one is working hard to remain independent in their own home, maybe it's time to explore all the options for independence, especially those that might offer more choices and less dependence on family.

*This article is a reprint of a blog posted by  
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