



"E Ola Ke Ola"
May Life Be Long

The Executive Office on Aging Presents

"It Worked For Me..." By Karen Koles



A Compilation of Caregiving Tips by Karen Koles,
A Former Caregiver and Facilitator of the Eldercare Support Group

When my family and I first started this journey called "caregiving," we searched unsuccessfully for a support group that would meet our specific needs. During this time of search, Mom and I enrolled in a state-sponsored class for caregivers where we met others who were in similar situations as ours. Our last class session was the Saturday following Hurricane Iniki where we decided to start a support group of our own without the guidance of professionals. We must be doing something right as we have been meeting for almost fifteen years. We call ourselves the Eldercare Support Group, and we meet on the last Saturdays of the month (except for December) from 9:30a – 12:30p at Kamehameha Homes Community Hall.

We occasionally invite guest speakers to address our group. But usually our meetings involve sharing personal experiences, crying together, and encouraging each other with the reminders that we are not alone in this experience. We also support each other during the inevitable periods of grief. We tell each other which vendors to avoid, share information that we have learned from attending seminars and workshops, and help each other problem solve by sharing what has worked for us under similar circumstances. We tell each other where to buy diapers, which agencies to contact for specific help, and share a pot luck meal during each of our gatherings.

We always welcome other past, present, and future caregivers to join us at our monthly meetings. As stressed out caregivers, we may not know the answers to specific concerns, but by putting our heads and hearts together, someone in the support group will know where help, information, or possible solutions might be available.

I've been writing "It Worked For Me" for the Executive Office on Aging's *Family Caregiver* newsletter for the past 5 years. I hope that you find this compilation of articles helpful for your often challenging, yet always rewarding, caregiving duties.

Q: Can you give me some practical hints about handling incontinence? My father is bedridden.

A: Cut a slit in an infant's diaper midway between the fastening tapes. Insert the penis through this slit and fasten the tapes. Then complete the process by fastening the adult diaper tapes. This diaper will absorb urine for approximately two hours. It will soon become apparent how frequently you will need to change this pee-patch.

Q: How can I make bed baths easier?

A: It's easier to do bed baths if you use washcloths and face towels instead of the regular-sized bath towels. These larger towels can sometimes be cumbersome to handle while giving a bed bath. Besides, the smaller towels are easier to launder because they are less bulky and dry more quickly!

Sew bright yarn in the corner of the washcloth that you'll use to "soap" your loved one. Don't attach any yarn to the "rinse" washcloth. Using this system we never got our washcloths mixed up!

Q: My mother is still ambulatory. I am afraid that someday, in spite of our efforts, she may wander away. What precautionary measures should I take?

A: On an index card or smaller, write down your mother's name, and the first names and phone numbers of several relatives or friends who are willing to help in case mom wanders away. Take this card to a shop to have it laminated. Punch a hole at an appropriate place. When you help Mom get dressed in the morning, attach this card with a safety pin in a location that Mom cannot reach or remove, like below her neck. If Mom wanders away, anyone who helps her will be able to notify you or your family.

Q: My dad tends to kick off blankets at night. What can I do to combat this problem?

A: Instead of covering dad with one regular-sized blanket, we used baby-sized blankets -- one to cover his lower body and legs, and another to cover his upper body. If it was a cold night, we'd use four baby blankets. We found that even if he managed to kick off a blanket, the rest of his body would be covered.

Additional benefit: If any of his blankets got soiled, our wash load was only half as large as it would have been if we had used regular-sized blankets.

Q: What should I include in mom's "day bag" that we send with her when she spends the day at my brother's house?

A: Besides the obvious (extra clothes, diapers, medication, etc.), include the following in a ziplock bag: (1) a copy of her "living will" or advance directives for health care, (2) a copy of her assignment of power of attorney, (3) the name and phone numbers of her physicians, and (4) a list of her medications with the instructions for administering.

Q: My husband spends a considerable amount of time in a wheelchair. How can I make him more comfortable?

A: Cushion: If your husband is unable to shift his weight, notice that because of the "sag" in the seat, his weight will not be evenly distributed, and skin irritations may occur. To prevent this, we used a sturdy foam cushion that was upholstered in a washable vinyl. The bottom surface was curved to fill in the wheelchair "sag." The top surface was flat. The front of the cushion was about 2 to 2-1/2 inches high while the back was only an inch thick. The purpose for this slightly backwards slope was to help prevent dad from pitching forward in his wheelchair.

Cushion Cover: We placed an open bath towel over the cushion. Other caregivers have used a sheepskin. The towel enabled us to do minor placement adjustments after lowering dad into the wheelchair without having to lift him again and again. The sheepskin allowed for better air circulation.

Tabletop for Wheelchair: Our initial tabletop was a symmetrically cut tabletop that fit around dad. Two knotted ropes were threaded through holes drilled in the tabletop. These ropes were looped around the metal supports of his wheelchair, then tied in the back. The only change in our second and improved model was a wider left side because dad's paralyzed left arm tended to slip off the first tabletop and resulted in a weight transfer and uncomfortable positioning. To further improve this tabletop, larger holes may be routed out where cups may be

inserted, preventing possible spills during meal times.

Table Padding: Place thin cushions or folded hand towels under your loved one's elbows and forearms (where he rests on the tabletop) to prevent skin irritations.

Leg Cushions: If your husband is unable to move his legs, you might want to place padding or thin cushions between his legs and the metal parts of the wheelchair.

Carrying Bag: You may want to tie a bag to the handles of the wheelchair (just as they do at the hospital to carry charts when transporting patients). To improve on this idea, attach pockets to the outside of the bags to hold additional items. One caregiver used Velcro to close the bag and pockets.

Q: Doctor visits are so frustrating for me. For obvious reasons, I try to schedule visits to two or three doctors on the same day. Even though all of the doctors practice in the same clinic, each of their nurses ask me what medications my mom is taking. How can I make this a simpler process?

A: On an index card, I wrote the name of the medication, the doctor who prescribed it, the date it was prescribed, and the dosage. Next, I had this card laminated. Then I simply handed the card to the nurse at the beginning of each visit. If a new medication was prescribed, and I didn't have time to make a new card, I'd just cross off or add information on the back of the card, using a laundry marker type of pen (a ball-point pen or regular type of felt marker won't work as well).

Another caregiver wrote a one-page report before each visit, noting any new developments or changes in his dad's condition that had occurred since the previous doctor's appointment. To write this report, he'd refer to notes that he had kept on a calendar.

Q: Any suggestions for simple, yet effective bibs?

A: Here are several suggestions that have worked for various caregivers in our support group. Stitch together two thicknesses of washcloths. Cut two lengths of bias tape and sew these to two corners.

Voila! You now have bibs that you can throw into the washer!

Another caregiver used alligator clips crimped to a length of ball chain (the kind used to turn some lamps or ceiling fans on/off). He then attached the clips to large disposable towels similar to the ones used at car repair shops. After meals, he simply unclipped and threw the paper towel away!

There's also an additional use of this alligator clip set-up (but with a longer chain). If your loved one stands upright while you are attempting to change a diaper, you know that the shirt often times gets in the way. Attach one of the alligator clips to the bottom front of the shirt. Place the chain over his shoulder and attach the second clip to the bottom back of the shirt.

Still another caregiver suggested that you save the clip that is used to refasten bags of coffee. Be sure to get the clip that has a hole. Thread, and then tie a shoestring, twine, or anything similar through these holes. Clip this contraption to a towel, and you have another bib. Or, ask your dentist for one of those commercial clips.

Q: Can you give me some hints for handling female incontinence?

A: You'll need (1) an outer diaper and (2) some form of absorbent padding, such as an overnigher sanitary pad, toddler diaper, or depend-type diaper. Cut X's through the plastic of the absorbent padding (and only the thin plastic liner, not the padding). The outer diaper remains uncut. Place the absorbent pad between the skin and the outer diaper, with the X's faced away from the skin. The X's will allow the urine to drain away from Mom's skin and into the outer diaper.

Q: We're bringing my dad with us on our family vacation. Do you have any travel tips?

A: Word of mouth is usually the most reliable indicator of "handicapped friendly" hotels, tourist attractions, airlines, etc. I've known caregivers who have been reduced to tears because what the hotel considers "handicapped accessible" and what the caregiver considers "handicapped accessible" are not always the same.

Let the airlines and hotels know in advance that you're traveling with an older adult needing assistance. Always request a room closest to the elevator. I know that when a handicapped person checked into one of the hotels in Waikiki, she was taken aback when security paid her a visit. She was so happy when they said that they wanted to meet her and to assure her that if it became necessary to evacuate the hotel, they would come up to carry her downstairs.

Be sure to alert the airlines about special dietary considerations. You might even wish to pack your own meal instead of ordering an in-flight meal. This would assure that your dad (and his digestive system) gets food that he's familiar with. Also, you may wish to be extra careful about your dad's diet for a couple of days prior to your departure. It'll be a more pleasant trip for everyone if dad doesn't have a bowel movement during the flight, especially if he's using diapers. However, be sure to grab the airline's blanket soon after you board. If dad has a bowel movement, you'll be able to change your dad's diaper on the plane just by draping the blanket over him and working under the blanket.

If you're renting a car, notify the company of your special needs, i.e. must be 4-door, trunk has to be large enough to accommodate luggage and a wheel chair (or walker or whatever), would prefer car that is not a high-mount. Also, bring your Handipass along because they're valid everywhere.

Finally, if you're still trying to decide on where to go for vacation...Disneyworld is a great vacation destination because it's easily accessible, when you're with your dad you can cut to the front of the line, and it's fun for the whole family.

Q: Sometimes I am so tired that I forget if I've given my wife her medication! What can I do to help me remember?

A: Use an ordinary steno tablet, the kind that has a line running down the middle of the page. On the left side, write the date and the day of the week. Below this, list whatever needs to be done for your wife. As each task is completed, enter the time that it was done. For example:

Breakfast – 7:15a
Dinner – 5:00p
Bath – 3:00p
Medication xyz – 12:00p
Medication abc – 5:00p

Within a few days, you'll resort to listing your own code instead of writing whole words! Like B, L, D, Ba, xyz, abc.

On the right side of the line, list anything significant that happened that day. For example:

- No bowel movement.
- Saw Dr. Jones and got new Rx for arthritis.
- Had hospital bed serviced. Got new mattress.

Caregivers have so many things to remember. Writing them down sure helped me!

Q: My mother has dementia and is now having difficulty swallowing. She can no longer handle even soft foods. We need to start pureeing foods and thickening liquids. Do you have any suggestions that would help?

A (by guest author, Jody Mishan): I found that the best machine for pureeing any kind of food, including meats, rice, breads and pastries, fruits and vegetables, is the Cuisinart Mini-Prep Plus. You can get them at Macy's for around \$39, or sometimes \$30 on sale. I tried several other brands before sticking with this one. The blade is lower to the floor of the plastic container, so it purees smoother and more completely.

Unfortunately, when you wash it, water gets trapped in the handle and mold can start to develop. It's very expensive to order new parts, and the Cuisinart company told me that there's no way to pry the handle apart to clean it. To avoid mold and other hassles, I place waterproof band aids over the little holes, and this has worked very well.

We use Thick-It for thickening the liquids, but it's hard to find in many stores. I get the large 30 oz. containers at Dauterman Medical Supply, or you can buy the smaller 8 oz. jars at Longs.

Q: Are there any kinds of foods that are easier to puree? Can I make the same kind of things my husband used to like?

A (by guest author, Jody Mishan): In caring for my 88-year old father through the beginning to advanced stages of Alzheimer's Disease, I have had one philosophy about food: It's one of the only pleasures left to him in this world, so I'm going to make sure it tastes good, he gets a variety, and is able to experience the tastes we all crave on this planet while he's still able. The new challenge of pureeing foods did not change that goal.

We know what our loved ones always liked to eat, so you just figure out how to puree the same foods to the right consistency, which is pudding-like, smooth, and without lumps. If you're just starting out, you need to use small amounts of liquid to puree foods, like milk, juice, gravy, or soup.

There are some foods that seem to taste better pureed, and the meal can look like an offering at a fine French nouvelle cuisine restaurant, with different colored mounds of food arranged like art on the plate.

Salmon purees very well. I cook it the way he used to like it, with olive oil, lemon, garlic and parsley. To puree it, I use a little milk or the juices left in the pan. With that I might serve broccoli and carrots, simmered to soft and also pureed with a tiny bit of milk. Regular or sweet potatoes can be cooked and mashed with a little butter. Or, as Karen Koles recommended, rice can be cooked with chicken or beef broth to very soft, and then pureed.

In discovering these new ways of preparing familiar foods, you realize that they all taste great. Pureeing vegetables in particular, hot and lightly buttered or seasoned, tastes like delicious soup. You can mix vegetables for different textures and tastes. Try adding cooked yellow squash to broccoli, for example. It sweetens and smooths it out.

With the right amount and kind of liquid, you can puree just about anything they used to like, even meats. I've even been able to puree lamb chops. I use more water than normal to make the lamb tender, and cut it into tiny pieces to puree it with pan

juices. The taste is magnificent, much better than baby food, which can be very bland.

No reason to deprive them of their favorite baked goods either! You can puree wheat bread by toasting it, cutting off the crust, adding a tiny bit of hot water and a pad of butter. It tastes like warm buttered bread. Same goes for cornbread or cakes.

A quick and easy idea is to puree frozen Eggo Waffles, by toasting one, and while it's still hot, breaking it up, adding a bit of hot water, a pad of butter, a teaspoon of maple syrup. One of dad's favorites over the years was peanut butter, which is dangerous for folks with dysphasia to eat. So I add a teaspoon of it to the waffle mixture. The result is heavenly.

For chocolate chip cookies, you can just melt one in a saucepan with a little hot water until it gets soft, and serve it that way, without pureeing.

Another quick and simple meal is to scramble eggs with a thin slice of cheese, and puree it with a little milk.

Often for dessert, I give him a Double Chocolate or Orange Milano Pepperidge Farm cookie, and dip it into hot thickened coffee or milk. He can nibble the soft moistened part.

The sky's the limit with what you can puree for them. It just takes a tablespoon of patience, a sprinkling of creativity, a pint of your time, and a gallon of love.

(Jody Mishan has been the primary caregiver for her father for six years, Public Awareness Coordinator for Kokua Mau, which is a Partnership Improving Care at the End of Life, and is a free-lance writer/producer.)

Q: Can you give us some hints about clothing for my mom?

A: Look for 100% cotton when shopping for sheets, shirts, underwear...everything that your mom will use. Reason? Cotton "breathes" while polyester & cotton/polyester blends tend to hold in body heat.

The professionals at the rehab gave us really great advice when they suggested that we do not allow

our loved one to remain in pajamas or hospital gowns 24-hours a day. We dressed dad in large t-shirts that had been slit up the back with bias tape ties sewn at the neck opening. My sister sewed large colorful bermuda shorts with very loose elastic threaded through the waistband and snaps instead of zippers. It was very easy to dress dad even though he was an invalid.

For a woman, brightly colored muumuus would be ideal. It'll be easier to dress your mom if the muumuu is sleeveless or has large sleeves and if the neckline is not snug. Just be sure that when you put your mom or dad into the wheelchair, that the clothing doesn't hitch up or bind...which could be rather uncomfortable.

Another caregiver swears by using Velcro as fasteners. Her dad is a stroke survivor who is intent on dressing himself but is really challenged when it comes to fastening buttons. She solved this problem (and preserved his dignity) by removing the buttons then re-stitching them to the buttonhole side of the shirt. She then ironed on Velcro strips where the buttons had originally been and to the underside of the buttonholes. With a little bit of ingenuity, even zippers could be replaced with Velcro!

Here's a final thought. One care recipient would go to her day care center returning home with pockets filled with "treasures." The returning of these "treasures" required a lot of time and effort. Her daughter chose instead to stitch the pockets closed, and since then, there have been no more treasure hunts!

Q: What hints can you give about doing my mom's laundry?

A: We ran dad's laundry through the "prewash" cycle, using a small amount of liquid laundry soap and the hottest water possible. This rinsed out any urine, spilled food, etc. Then we reset the washer on the heavy duty cycle (for better agitation), used the normal amount of laundry soap (less the amount used in the prewash cycle), and again, used the hottest water possible. The rinse cycle used cold water. When the machine stopped, we reset the washer for another wash and rinse cycle, but used cold water.

This put the laundry through three rinse cycles. This way, we were pretty sure that all the soap had been rinsed out, and the laundry dried soft and fluffy. You will notice that we did not use any liquid fabric softener in the washing machine or fabric softening sheets in the dryer. Fabric softeners tend to build up with repeated use; towels become much less absorbent.

If you have a clothes dryer, use it at the hottest setting. This really sanitizes the clothes.

Q: What are Chux?

A: Chux are absorbent, plastic-lined, disposable protectors that make caregiving a lot easier. They can be used under a person lying in bed to soak up anything that leaks from a diaper, is great to absorb moisture during a bed bath or under your loved one when sitting in a wheelchair....you get the idea.

The "negative" side of chux is the heat build up. Try this: Lie down on a chux. You'll soon feel the heat. Now, if you have a backache, lying on a chux brings warm relief. But if you're bed bound or have difficulty turning in bed, you can imagine in today's weather how uncomfortable this would quickly become.

Q: Any suggestions about disposing of diapers and other trash?

A: All diapers should be bagged and tied in plastic shopping bags before being tossed into a plastic trash bag. Trash should be taken out daily. Both of these practices will do a lot to eliminate odor and germs. You want to wash out the trash container periodically using a disinfectant; however, keep in mind that this container will probably be in the same room as your loved one so be careful about using cleaning products that leave a strong, lingering scent which your loved one may find objectionable.

Q: I am not a caregiver. I am a friend of a caregiver. How can I help her during this difficult time?

A: You are such a special person! There are so many ways that you can show your support. Whenever you phone her, your first question should ask if this is an inconvenient time for her to talk. If your friend is in the midst of taking care of her loved

one, her attention should be focused on this activity. Arrange to talk at another time.

Note: A hands-free phone is a wonderful device because this allows the caregiver to talk while folding laundry, sweeping the floor, etc.

One mom's favorite calabash nieces would deliver complete meals: entree in a pot to be reheated; a salad and dessert packed in a tiny cooler, and even rice to complete the meal! As an extra considerate touch, one that mom really appreciated, Kim would share flowers that clients had delivered to her office!

Tell your caregiver friend that you will be going to Store A in a couple of days. Offer to pick up anything that she needs from this store. Then deliver these purchases to her home. Do the same before you go to Store B. If you really want to be helpful, don't offer to go to several stores on the same day. It requires too much time to put everything away!

Other much appreciated offers is to stop off at the post office to mail any packages or purchase stamps; drop off videos at the video store; or borrow/return books/tapes at the library.

Do you realize how complicated it is to take a loved one to the doctor's? You could offer to drive and park the car so that your friend doesn't have to leave her loved one unattended. Just don't forget the handicapped parking pass!

Offer to stay with your friend's loved one for a couple of hours each week. The caregiver will feel more comfortable about your offer of respite if you're familiar with her loved one's routine. Do not make this offer unless you really intend to carry it out.

What should you NOT do? Never ask your friend to call you if she needs help.

Q: Thank you for your thoughtful suggestions over the years. They've really helped. I know that you've been recovering from an illness, and I was wondering if you have any thoughts from the perspective of a person receiving care.

A: For the past eight months I have been a care recipient. Believe it or not, I have come to the conclusion that it is better to be a caregiver than a care recipient. Now that I am on the road to recovery, I'd like to share some thoughts with you from the point of view of a care recipient.

As a caregiver, I firmly believed that my loved one required daily baths and would feel so much better after one. I quickly came to realize as a care recipient that daily baths are exhausting and caused my skin to dry out. I found the different lotions that were supposed to keep my skin soft and pliable were actually sticky and uncomfortable. Basic cleanliness? Yes! Daily baths? Not always necessary, especially while one is bed-bound.

Blessed are the family, friends, and neighbors who believe that chicken soup cures all ills. The foods that I appreciated most were delivered in microwavable containers, in single-serving amounts, and in disposable dishes. I appreciated the phone calls that informed me when the food would be delivered because that eliminated the possibility of too much food on some days and nothing on other days. Considerate cooks took the time to inquire what foods would be appealing to my taste buds as well as what foods I needed to avoid. Best of all were the friends who occasionally delivered enough food to feed the entire family, thus giving my caregiver a well-deserved respite from cooking.

Often I was too exhausted to go grocery shopping or unable to drive due to the effects of medication. Friends would call to ask what I needed, then drop off a small sack of groceries. It was easier to put away a few items a couple of times a week rather than a large number of items at one time.

Bill-paying became a chore because writing was so difficult for me. A wonderful and trusted friend wrote out my checks and filled out any necessary forms. Another friend took my dictation and wrote out many thank-you notes. All I had to do was laboriously sign my name.

As a care recipient, I appreciated friends who called before coming by to visit. These true friends would make the effort to visit and understood if the visit had to be limited to just ten minutes when exhaustion

would set in and I'd have to excuse myself. Special blessings on visitors who didn't wear any perfume or aftershave, as strong scents would bring on bouts of nausea. As my energy level improved, I enjoyed being taken on short car rides and later, for walks which provided much needed fresh air, exercise, and a chance to be out of the house.

Also appreciated were foot massages, back rubs, flowering plants which required minimal care, cards and letters of encouragement, offers of transportation to doctors' appointments and medical tests, and short phone calls.

"Call if you need anything" was an often repeated phrase, but as a care recipient, I hesitated to call for fear of inconveniencing others. It was much easier when friends called with a definite offer ("I'm going to the supermarket tomorrow. What can I pick up for you?"), leaving me to accept or decline their generosity.

Q: The holidays are quickly approaching. Do you have any tips for the season?

A: With the Holiday Season quickly approaching, please remember that mochi can be very dangerous for our loved ones. Mochi can be a serious life-threatening choking hazard because once swallowed, it will not melt like a large spoonful of ice cream, jello, or even an ice cube. Even though mochi may have traditional significance in your family, it might be best to avoid any form of this food for your loved one.

Another word of caution: The Holiday Season often means rich foods, changes in our dietary habits, sharing new and different dishes. This sharing should not reach out to our loved ones on a restricted diet. Besides the obvious reasons like not sharing desserts with a diabetic, think about what changes in diet does to the sensitive digestive tract of someone used to a bland diet. Think about diarrhea and upset stomach.

Have you prepared for the New Year's fireworks and air pollution? A friend who suffers from severe respiratory problems uses New Year's Eve as a family celebration by checking into a high rise hotel to watch everyone else's fireworks from within an air conditioned room. If your loved one cannot be easily

transported, you may want to invest (buy, borrow, or rent) in several portable room air purifiers. Close all the windows and leave the bedroom door partially opened to allow for fresh air to enter the room. Your loved one may find it comforting to have a radio or the television to help mask the noise of the fireworks. If it's possible, spend the evening "talking story" about past New Year celebrations with your loved one. Incidentally, your pets might benefit from this set-up, too!

Q: How can I renovate in the bathroom to make it easier for dad?

A: Here are a few tips that I've learned from a few good friends. The first comes from a Mr. Fix It. He's noticed that many toilet tanks start leaking from tiny stress cracks which occur when the user leans back while sitting on the toilet. An explanation of why this happens would fill this column, but here's the "ounce of prevention" tip. Roll a towel as tightly as possible into a solid cylinder. Tape the length of this cylinder using duct tape, masking tape, or anything similar. Remove the cover on the tank. Wedge the towel cylinder between the back of the toilet tank and the wall behind it. Be sure that you are not forcing the tank forward. The whole purpose is to not have any movement of the tank. Replace the toilet tank cover.

Mr. Fix It's next hint is to install a hand-held shower to make bathing an easier task. Look for a unit that can be installed above the shower head of your existing shower and one that allows the rest of the family to use either the "regular" shower head or the hand-held attachment. As part of water conservation, you might want to temporarily halt the water flow while soaping your loved one or giving a shampoo, so get a hand-held that allows you to shut off the water somewhere along the handle. When you need the water again, you can just restart the water flow without having to readjust the water temperature or rate of flow.

As for grab bars, consider stainless steel. The cheaper bars that are coated with a plastic will rust out as soon as there's a tiny crack in the plastic! But remember that the stainless steel can be slippery. One way to solve that problem is to wind old-fashion bandage tape around the bar. This tape might need to be replaced occasionally. Be careful about making this a do-it-yourself project! You might want

to consider having this done by a professional as cracked shower tiles are a real possibility.

Where to install these grab bars? Mr. Fix It suggests that they should be installed wherever there is a step up (or down).

Q: Do you have any suggestions for using a hospital bed at home?

A: Hospital beds are wonderful for many obvious reasons. One of the problems of having a hospital bed, however, is that when the head of the bed is raised, the user tends to slide down towards the foot of the bed! To solve this problem, use a lift sheet. Make this sheet by cutting a flat bed sheet in half width-wise. Hem the raw edge, keeping in mind that bulky hems might be uncomfortable. Place this lift sheet under your loved one with the top edge under the shoulders. For best results, the bottom edge should be under the okole or even lower. There are two ways to use this sheet. If two people are available, they should stand at either side of the bed, gripping the top and bottom of the lift sheet. Bunch and grab the lift sheet close to the shoulders and okole, not at the edges of the sheet. One person should count aloud: one, two, three. At "three," both should slide the sheet towards the head of the bed.

A second method works when only one caregiver is available. Stand at the head of the bed. Reach down to bunch and grab the sheet close to the outside of the shoulders. Remember your body mechanics and pull with your body, not just your arms.

This lift sheet also works well when you need to rotate your loved one from side to side. Stand on either the left or right side of your loved one. Lean across your loved one's body and grasp the lift sheet, rolling your loved one towards you. Be careful not to pull too hard or your loved one will end up on his/her face! With your loved one now laying on his/her side, this is a good time to give a good back rub, which feels great, and increases the circulation, lessening the possibility of pressure sores. This is also a great opportunity to wedge a body pillow between the lift sheet and the bed sheet (body pillows are between four and five feet long, and usually with a synthetic filling. If you are careful, they are washable). Be sure that the angle of the

wedge is small enough that your loved one cannot roll over on his/her face. After a few minutes, pull on the lift sheet again, remove the pillow wedge, and return your loved one to lying on his/her back. Next time, stand on the opposite side and repeat the procedure. Until you are certain of how far to wedge this pillow, as a safety precaution, be sure to stay in the room with your loved one.

And finally, this is a tip learned when a friend had his mother at a rehabilitation facility. Her mattress was placed on the floor! It lessened the possibility of injury if she rolled off her bed. A word of caution here is to make sure that your loved one can get out of bed and stand up easily from such a low position. You, as a caregiver, need to consider your back when helping your loved one out of bed.

Q: My mom uses a commode. How can I make cleaning the commode an easier process?

A: Here's an idea that I wish that I had known while caregiving. It would have saved an incredible amount of time! After each use, you probably spend time emptying, washing, then disinfecting the catch-pan. Try this instead. Line the catch-pan with a brand new trash bag with drawstrings. The 13-gallon size works well. Lower the commode seat, making sure that the edge of the bag is draped over the outer edges of the catch-pan. After the commode is used, just raise the seat, pull on the drawstrings, and discard in the trash. Replace the trash bag and you're ready for the next use! The caregiver who used this idea warned against the use of shopping bags from the supermarket which have a tendency to develop tears and holes along the seams. He also suggested that each time after washing and drying your hands, dry out the paper towels then place them in the trash bag liner to absorb liquids.

Q: My dad loves to read but it's difficult for him to see. Any thoughts?

A: Another caregiver whose mother is legally blind borrows audio books (or books on tapes) from the public library. She says that large print books are also available. The drawback to the large print books is their size and weight. The solution to this is a book holder that can be placed on a table or on a stack of books, placing the book at eye-level. This book holder is what typists use next to their

computers and is available at stationery stores. To keep the pages from flipping, use clothes pins to hold the pages in place. Another option is to cut a length of elastic and tie the ends together. Slip this loop over the book or magazine and the book holder. Your loved one might require some help in turning the pages.

One quadriplegic care recipient who was a voracious reader was able to turn his own pages by having a chopstick placed in a cup close to his side. A pencil eraser cap was placed on the far end to "grip" the page. He'd clamp the chopstick in his teeth, turn the page, replace the chopstick in the cup, and was good to go!

Q: I don't look forward to meal times. Do you have any ideas to make feeding easier?

A: As caregivers, we need to be alert to what might be happening when our loved one's eating habits change and to consult with the doctors or nurses when this happens. But consider this: one care recipient experienced aches and pains while eating which would subside if someone kept him company during his meals. Another loved one started eating more and more slowly because that was one of the

few times that he could count on having undivided attention. Get the message?

If your loved one has coordination problems and experiences difficulty while feeding himself, you might want to wrap duct tape around the fork or spoon handles. These thickened handles are much easier to grasp. Vision problems might make it difficult to see the fork or spoon. Try using opaque disposable spoons & forks (not the clear ones).

Do you remember the divided plates that we used to feed our youngsters? They had a reservoir beneath the plate that we filled with hot water to keep the food warm. Conversely, if the food should be kept cool, the reservoir can be filled with ice water. For visually handicapped care recipients, it's very helpful to describe the plate of food by comparing food placement to a clock face: rice at six o'clock, stew at nine o'clock, tossed salad at 1 o'clock.

Disclaimer: The suggestions given by Ms. Koles are helpful tips that she found successful while caring for her father, and are not to be interpreted as fact or intended to guarantee similar results while caring for your loved one.

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