

As we age, we sometimes find it necessary to change the status quo. The days of keeping our health issues and our final wishes a secret, especially from our children, may need to be over.

Here are 5 things we can do as aging seniors to help bridge the gap between protecting our own privacy and independence and preparing our children for our coming days of declining health and ultimate death.

1. Choose at least one child to grant access to our medical teams and important information

A heart attack, a car accident, or a serious illness can happen at any time. They aren't planned. And they can land us in a hospital full of strangers, especially if we don't always stay close to home.

Someone should be able to contact our personal doctor and discuss our options with all doctors concerned if we are unable to speak for ourselves.

Because we come from a generation taught that parents don't share financial information with their children, we may be uncomfortable sharing all of our personal passwords, bank account information, safe deposit box keys, etc. with our loved ones. But it is important that our family at least knows who to contact if they need that information. And we'll need to give the bank or accountant or others permission to speak to our loved ones if they should ask.

2. Stay Connected

Research

<https://nam.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Preparing-for-Better-Health-and-Health-Care-for-an-Aging-Population.pdf>

has proven that social engagement has many health benefits.

Whether we volunteer or continue to work for pay, connections with others will boost our well-being. There are many organizations out there that would help fulfill this necessary component, many of which provide support for those with physical limitations.

We need to get or stay plugged in with our church or synagogue, a local senior citizens center, or any other volunteer organization.

[provide link to list]

3. Look into palliative care

Many are not even aware of this option for assistance.

Palliative care is medical care focused on improving the quality of life of patients with serious illnesses, treating symptoms and providing emotional support.

Those providing us with palliative care can help us to find help that we may be hesitant to ask for. They can direct us to people willing to mow the lawn, clean the house, or give us a ride to the doctor when our family and neighbors are unavailable or in the same predicament we are.

This care can also create a bridge between our medical professionals and our designated care-givers. And it allows us an outlet to express your wishes both in terms of our current care and our end-of-life options.

4. Pre-plan medical and funeral arrangements

No one would plan a wedding in two days. Why make our loved ones plan the celebration of our life in such a short time?

A living will is a document that lets us state our wishes for end-of-life medical care, in case we become unable to communicate our decisions. By preparing ahead, we can know that our family will not have to guess what we would want. The living will removes the pressure from our loved ones of making a potentially life-changing decision under very stressful conditions.

By working with a funeral director pre-need, we can ease the financial and emotional burdens on our family. We can allow our family to get the closure they will need if all of the big decisions have already been made and the big bills have already been paid. We will know that our final wishes will be honored, and we'll have the peace of mind that comes with knowing we've done all we can do to ease their burden.

5. Think about and prepare for “what if”

Many things can and will happen unexpectedly as we age. An unexpected fall isn't as easy to recover from at 70 as it was at 7. We can help our loved ones by taking precautions that help

the unexpected become nothing more than a speed bump on our journey.

Many options exist to help us in prevention, such as security systems, life-alerts, and friends & neighbors who check on us frequently. We can ask our care-givers (doctors, physical therapists, pharmacists, relatives, etc.) what we should be aware of as we age. [*maybe insert list here of generalized reference lists*] Think about those possibilities now and put things in place.

It's a good idea to make a list of all our medications and all medical procedures we've had done and carry it with us. Medical alert bracelets or keychains or necklaces are also a great way to alert first responders when we can't tell them ourselves. This helps anyone who needs to care for us on a moment's notice to have vital information necessary in diagnosing and treating our unexpected emergency.

As we age, life seems to throw us one curve-ball after another. We can't possibly plan for every eventuality. But this list is a good place to start in communicating with those who matter most to us. It lets them know our wishes, and it allows us to enjoy our time together, just being in the moment and making memories to be shared with many generations to come.