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What Is Companion Care?

BY MARY TERWILLIGER

Few things are more reassuring than having a friend or companion to rely on for help, especially as we age. A caring companion can enrich the lives of our elderly loved ones — whether it's someone to carry the groceries, or check in when it's time to take medication.

The addition of companion care services can provide emotional support and friendship to someone who lives alone, in addition to assistance with daily activities.

These companions help keep seniors mentally engaged and stimulated, which is essential to maintaining healthy brain function.

Unlike medical care, companion care does not include hands-on treatment, but provides seniors with help at home in a number of different ways:



- Meal planning & preparation
- Medical reminders
- Escorting to appointments
- Short-term recovery assistance after hospitalizations, rehabilitation or surgery
- Respite care
- Transportation for shopping & errands
- Light and full housekeeping
- Safety and supervision
- Pet care assistance
- Handyman services
- 24-hour care
- Stand-by assist

Companion care is about encouraging older adult to stay healthy and motivated, maintaining their pride and independence while having a helping hand.

Companions also play a vital role in a senior's health as the liaison between the individual and his or her family. Some-

one who spends hours each day with a senior may be more aware of changes in behavior that can indicate a health issue, and the companion can inform family members who otherwise might not have been aware of the issue.

Many times, companions can be like family to these older adults. It's important to choose a companion care service that thoroughly screens its employees and that provides a uniquely matched companion the senior can rely upon. In combination with family members, senior companions can be incredibly helpful in keeping aging loved ones active and thoughtful as their lives change. ☀

Mary Terwilliger is the executive director of Living Well Companion Care at Jewish Senior Life.

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High Body Mass Linked to Hearing Loss in Women

BY NICHOLAS BAKALAR

A high body mass and a large waist are both associated with self-reported hearing loss, a new study has found.

Researchers used data from a 20-year prospective study of 68,421 women who were 25 to 42 years old at the start. After controlling for age, smoking, diabetes, hypertension and other factors, they found that the higher the body mass index, the greater the risk for hearing loss. Compared with women with a B.M.I. under 25, those with an index of 25 to 29 had an 8 percent increased risk. The numbers kept going up in tandem: 11 percent for 30 to 34, 16 percent for 35 to 39 and 19 percent for those above 40. The increasing risk associated with larger waist circumference fol-

lowed a similar pattern.

The study, published in the December issue of The American Journal of Medicine, found that moderate physical activity — as little as four hours of walking a week — also reduced the risk for hearing loss. Researchers found no further advantage in more vigorous exercise.

The lead author, Dr. Sharon G. Curhan, a clinical researcher at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, suggested that obesity might compromise blood flow to the inner ear, and that exercise might improve it, which could explain the associations.

"Hearing loss may not be an inevitable part of growing older," she said. "There may be things we can do to prevent it."

—NYT