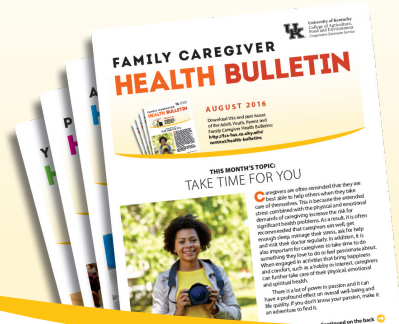


FAMILY CAREGIVER HEALTH BULLETIN

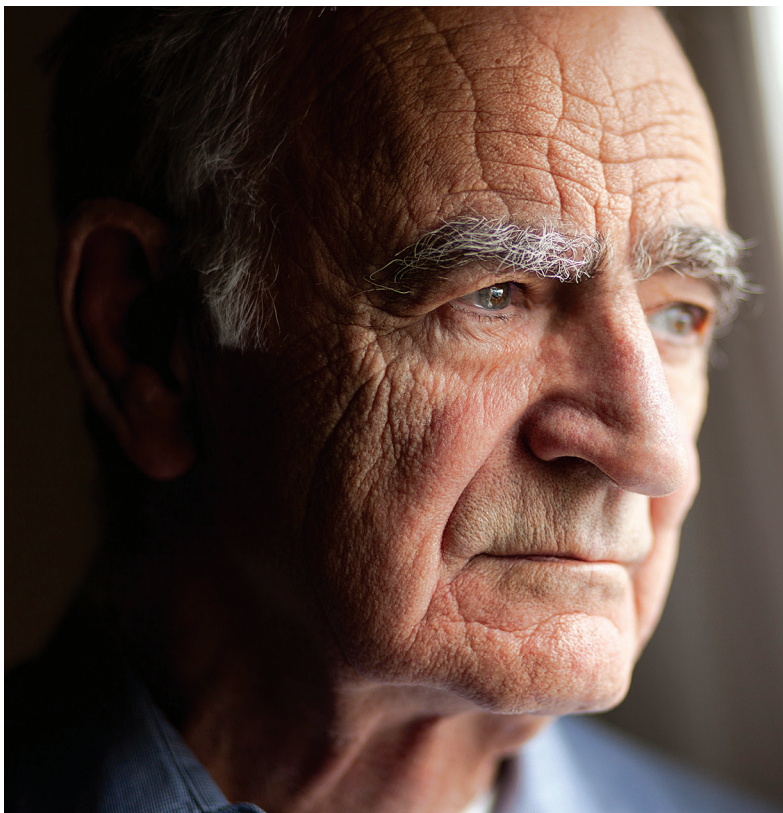


FEBRUARY 2020

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

UNCOOPERATIVE CARE RECIPIENTS



Older adults become more dependent on their caregivers as they age because of illness, frailty, and physical and/or cognitive declines. They often associate this dependence with loss of control over their lives, especially as caregivers begin taking over many of the things they once did. Feeling helpless can lead to frustrations and feelings of inadequacy. One common way for people to regain a sense of control is to be uncooperative with their caregivers. According to Johns Hopkins (2019), it is important to recognize what is happening to help enhance cooperation.

- **Identify abilities.** Allow your loved one to do things that he/she is still capable of doing or could do with a little assistance. Doing things contributes to a person's sense of purpose, and purpose is associated with increased independence and overall well-being.

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Including your loved one in decisions can enhance self-esteem and a sense of control.

➔ Continued from page 1

- **Be patient and revise expectations.** Small tasks that might seem meaningless, such as tying a shoe or buttoning a shirt, are easy for caregivers to do to save time or to be helpful. But taking away such a task can also negatively affect a person's dignity because it becomes one more thing that they cannot do for themselves.
- **Empower your loved one.** Including your loved one in decisions can enhance self-esteem and a sense of control. Decisions can vary depending on ability and can range from simple choices like what to wear or eat to preferences on housing options. It is important to present your loved one with realistic choices. For example, if living at home is not an option, then it should not be presented as one. Allowing a loved one to participate in decision-making can help you become more aware of their wishes.
- **Set your loved one up for success.** If your loved one cannot read or see very well, then don't leave a written to-do list. If he/she cannot hear very well, be sure they confirm their understanding with you. You can also think about ways to adapt their environment: Velcro can replace shoe strings, and zippers may be easier than buttons. Physical barriers can also be removed or spaces enhanced. For example, add grab bars in bathrooms, and make sure spaces are well-lit.
- **Turn a "no" into a "yes" through compromise.** If your loved one says "no" to everything, think of ways that you can compromise. For example, if your loved one does not want to shower, perhaps he/she will agree to a sponge bath.
- **Create an award system to promote cooperation.** For adults who have lost their ability to reason, a reward system (e.g., bribery or tricks) can trigger cooperation because they will get something out of it.
- **Try various methods of questioning or encouragement.** If your loved one does not respond the first time you ask a question or make a request, wait a minute or two and ask



again in a different way. By the third time, you may need to use a personal plea, such as "I really need your help" or interject components of their life story, like "you've always been good at this." Sometimes a gentle touch and guidance in a particular direction can be helpful.

Power struggles are common between caregivers and their loved ones, and if you get into one, it is not the end of the world. Do not let it get the best of you, and do not take it personally. When your loved one tells you "no" or refuses to do something, it is likely not a rejection of you. It may just indicate the loss of ability for your loved one to make a good decision. In such cases, remember that your loved one is lucky to have you as an advocate to help them be as safe and as independent as possible in their home and community.

REFERENCE:

Johns Hopkins University. (2019). *What Can I Do to Gain More Cooperation From My Loved One* Retrieved from https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/johns_hopkins_bayview/community_services/services/called_to_care/gain-cooperation.html

FAMILY CAREGIVER
HEALTH BULLETIN

Written by: Amy F. Kostelic, Ph.D.
Edited by: Alyssa Simms
Designed by: Rusty Manseau
Stock images: 123RF.com

