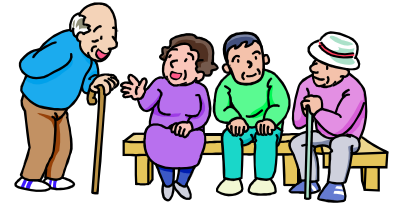

KEEPING THEIR FREEDOMS

Independence Is Very Important To Seniors

When people envision a picture of a Boy Scout helping a little old lady across the street, they tend to focus on the frailty, need and good deed. Rarely does it come to mind how strong the woman is to be out on her own, pushing aside obstacles and living as full a life as possible.

Our society sometimes forgets that independence is a priority for most seniors. They want to do for themselves, come and go as they please, and make their own decisions. Fortunately, more and more seniors are able to maintain their independence than ever before.

For seniors with illnesses and disabilities that create a dependence on others, it is still important to retain some fragments of independence. Maybe they can no longer cook for themselves. However, caregivers and family members should realize it could mean an awful lot to that senior to pick what's on the menu tonight or choose the restaurant.



Lack of mobility can be a barrier to independence. Senior communities knock down much of that barrier by making it much easier to socialize with friends and participate in activities.

WHAT HELPS SENIORS STAY MORE INDEPENDENT

Here are some of the reasons why seniors are able to retain more of their independence as they age.

- ◆ **More education.** In 2003, 72% of seniors were high school graduates and 17% had a bachelor's degree. In 1950, only 17% had high school diplomas and 3% claimed bachelor degrees. Education affects decision making, income levels and lifestyle.
- ◆ **Less poverty.** From 1974 to 2002, the median income level for households of seniors (65 or older) increased from \$16,882 to \$23,152 (calculated in 2002 dollars). Between 1984 and 2001, the median net worth of seniors (65 or older) increased by 82%, when adjusted for inflation.
- ◆ **Living longer and healthier.** The average American lives to age 77.6, using 2003 data. The age-adjusted proportion of seniors (65 or older) with a chronic disability decreased from 25% in 1984 to 20% in 1999.

- ◆ **Health care.** The system is not ideal, but good health care is commonly available. And even though prices are on the rise, most bills are paid - 54% by Medicare, 10% by Medicaid, 15% by private insurers and 21% by the senior (65 or older).
- ◆ **Medications and therapies.** Drugs help seniors to overcome, or at least deal with, many previously disabling symptoms. Also, therapies and medical equipment help many seniors to maintain mobility.
- ◆ **Bounce back.** About 4 out of every 5 newly-disabled seniors regain the ability to live independently within 6 months of their disabling event.
- ◆ **Stubbornness.** Many seniors don't buy into the common social attitude that they are supposed to be helpless and needy. Instead, they choose to do for themselves.

(Sources: Federal Interagency Forum on Age-Related Statistics, National Inst. On Aging)



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