



The Upbeat

Getting your life in shape
and energy conservation

September 2022, Volume 8



Dear friends,

Welcome to the September issue of The Upbeat! This issue is all about energy conservation. And by that I don't mean just saving money on utilities or sustaining global resources, but managing your personal energy throughout the day to improve your odds of success in all you do.

Last summer, my family's first grandchild gave us all a gift: we discovered the mediterranean tradition of siestas, a short nap or break after lunch that, according to research, has a positive effect on heart health as well as overall energy levels. When the baby took her afternoon nap, we all rested along with her, and found that our whole family, ages 1 to 85, benefited from this collective downtime.

As my family gears up for the fall fun and seasonal chores that lie ahead, I hope to carry our summer siesta tradition and other energy conservation principles into our daily routines. Once you understand the general principles, you can be creative, too. School days don't allow my kids to nap, but we can cultivate daily rest rituals as a family in other ways—after school cookies or bedtime stories—that allow us all to connect and recharge.

Energy conservation techniques are proven to improve quality of life, reduce falls, and empower you to maintain your home well into your 80s, 90s, and 100s. My parents have successfully adopted many of the strategies you'll read more about in this issue, such as breaking down big tasks into 30-minute intervals and alternating stand-up tasks with more quiet sit-down ones.

I hope that you'll be inspired by the personal energy conservation ideas in this issue and experiment with them in your own life. And I'd love to hear from you about how it goes! Write to me anytime at newsletter@assuredallies.com.

Wishing you a productive and refreshing autumn season,

Dr. Anna Annecca, OTD, OTR/L
Clinical Operations and Development

Saving Energy for What's Important



By Dr. Michal Herz

We are encouraged from a young age to “give it everything you’ve got” when it comes to schoolwork, sports, work, and more. Later in life, we bring that same all-in commitment to all sorts of endeavors, from raising children to saving for retirement, caring for a beloved pet, or growing a bountiful vegetable garden to feed your own family and many others thanks to the potatoes, lettuce, and kale you donate to a local food bank.

All of these acts can involve unconditional love and 24/7 responsibility. And they all take energy. By midlife, many of us feel that we are spread too thin; there is too much going on. We can’t keep up, and sometimes we crash.

One of the many wonderful things about the aging process is that it helps us to focus on what is really important. When it gets harder to hear, we focus on the sounds most valuable to us—meaningful conversations with our near and dear, or the jazz music we love.

When our hand starts to ache after 15 minutes of gardening, we learn to pick the ripest fruit we can enjoy today.

The need to preserve our energy as we age is a gift that our body gives us. We learn to make clear and conscious decisions about what to focus on. What do we really value and cherish? What really has to get done today, and what can be put off until next week, or never?

Deciding how to spend our energy can be done in the same way as planning a budget. We have limited resources. There are certain things that we want—that we must—achieve, and others that we now have the wisdom and confidence to reject. So start the week by asking yourself, what do I want to focus my prime energy on this week? Maybe you could write it down, and then organize it into achievable steps.

Pick a weekly theme like getting your house ready for winter, or sorting through a closet full of old clothes. Maybe one week is all about getting routine physical tests completed. These can be stressful, with follow-up tasks and questions that go beyond just getting to and from the appointment.

On challenging weeks, allow yourself breathing room. Prep what you can in advance; arrange for extra help and support. Don’t forget to add fun and rewards, too! For example, on any given week you could:

1. Plan a night in with a close friend and order take out food
2. Minimize your normal housework and cleaning or get help
3. The week before, arrange for any transport to and from the places you need
4. Grocery shop and menu plan in advance
5. Have people ready to talk to before and after any key events like doctor appointments.



Is Your Home Ready to Age With You?



By Angelina Portuense, Senior Ally

Let's face it: as we get older, the choices we made when buying or designing a home years ago may no longer work as well. For example, bathtubs are harder to get in and out of than showers. Doorways might be too narrow for walkers and wheelchairs. In this essay, I will walk you through a typical home and review some of our AgeAssured Allies' best tips to make it as safe and accessible as possible.



A Smooth Entrance

Front steps: If you have any front steps, make sure that they are in good condition (i.e. uncracked concrete or solid wood) and have handrails on both sides. Handrails should extend beyond the bottom and top of the stairs to provide support for their entire length. If stairs become a challenge, consider installing a metal ramp certified by the ADA (Americans with Disability Act) with a licensed contractor or a Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS).

Doorways: At the entrance (and around any doorway in your home), ensure that there is enough clearance for ambulatory assistive devices (such as a walkers, wheelchairs or rollators) in case you ever need one or are already using one; a minimum of 36 inches in width is ideal. Make sure that your entryway is well lit at night and that any welcome mats are secured to the floor properly to avoid becoming a tripping hazard.



Age-Friendly Kitchens

The kitchen is often the heart of a home, the place where meals come alive, delicious smells waft, and creativity either soars or plummets. Whether you enjoy cooking or have a love-hate relationship with it, being able to prepare your own meals is a big part of aging successfully. Happily, there are steps you can take to make your kitchen more age-friendly.

Countertops and Shelves: Keep them free from clutter, especially those close to the stove. When it comes to where to store things, put the items that you use on a daily/frequent basis at arms-reach when standing at the counter. Invest in a sturdy step stool to reach things on top shelves, ideally, one with a handrail and non-skid rubber for your feet.

Kitchen Tools: Switch to more ergonomic utensils and tools and consider soft-grip bowls and shears. Many older adults like rocker knives, which allow you to cut vegetables and fruit on a cutting board with one hand. An electric can opener might be another wise investment.



Safer Bathrooms

Designing safe and sturdy transitions in bathrooms are key to making them age-friendly. Is there enough space for you to transition from sink to shower or shower to toilet? If space is an issue, think about installing grab bars, which take up hardly any room. If space is not an issue or permanent grab bar placement is not possible or desirable, explore durable medical equipment that can help with challenging transitions. For example, if you have a large tub wall that requires you to step over it in order to enter the

bath or shower, consider a shower transfer bench that you can sit on and slide off of to get over the tub barrier. If getting off the toilet is becoming more difficult, consider a raised toilet seat with arms. Since bathrooms floors can be slippery when wet, consider installing non-stick tape in and outside of the shower as well as non-slip shower mats.



Well-Equipped Bedrooms

Navigating dark hallways and stairwells in the middle of the night is not ideal at any age. Not only are our eyes not fully adjusted after waking, but our movements can be slower than normal. So make sure all of your hallways are well-lit and cleared of clutter, especially any hallways going from your bedroom to the bathroom. Light switches should be conveniently located, i.e. at the entry to the hall from the bedroom). Consider battery-operated motion sensor night lights.

Be mindful of how “slippery” your comforter and sheet sets are. As a geriatric case manager, I have lost count of how many stories I’ve heard from clients who have fallen out of their beds because their covers were too slippery!

Next, think about how your furniture is arranged. Is there ample space around doorways? A clear passage from the bed to the bathroom or hallway? If getting on or off the bed is becoming a challenge, consider a bed grab bar that can help you pull yourself up and out. Access to a phone in the middle of the night is also important; make sure there is a place close to the bed where a phone can be securely held and charged. A light should be easily reached and switched on from the bed, too.



Easy Living Rooms

Living rooms often need to be re-configured as we age to facilitate cleaning and to prevent falls. Examine critically whether you need all of your furniture and knick knacks. Area rugs should be securely fastened to the floor to avoid being a tripping hazard. Electrical cords should be secured to the wall or away from any foot traffic and coiled to remove any slack. Consider anything you can do to make the living room easier to clean, such as de-cluttering, installing hardwood floors versus carpet, or replacing horizontal blinds with vertical ones for easier dusting.

At Assured Allies, we fully support your desire to age happily in the place you call home. I hope these tips have been helpful. We have plenty more! We’d also love to hear what works for you so we can share your tips with other members. Please reach out to us anytime at assured.care.





Beverly and Donald: An AgeAssured Story

Happily married since 1953, Beverly, age 87, and Donald, age 88, are aging in place at their home in Virginia, surrounded by a great support network of family and friends. Beverly is a retired nurse and Donald is a retired US Navy Chaplain, and they enjoy being actively engaged in church, family, and social engagements. When Beverly's health issues began to affect her lifestyle in recent years, Assured Allies stepped in both to help her and to support Donald, who eagerly took on the role of his wife's primary caregiver: "I love being a caregiver," says Donald, "It gives me joy."

Assured Allies helped the couple understand all of the local resources in their area, like resource and senior centers. These resources have helped free up Donald's time and energy so that he can be more available as a caregiver to his wife. While Beverly is able to bathe and get dressed independently, she is no longer able to drive or stand for long periods of time. So Donald does the shopping, cooking, and housework, and manages all of her medications. Does Beverly like her husband's cooking? "I love this restaurant!" she replied.

The relationship with Assured Allies was helpful to the couple a second time in the last year when Beverly's health changed significantly and Donald requested further support. "I love your approach," he noted during a call with his Ally, "you are so thorough and do your job beautifully."

At Assured Allies, we are proud and delighted that our Age Assured program has helped Beverly and Donald receive the support they need to remain at home, make more memories, and keep laughing together: "You know you are getting old when your youngest is turning 64!"



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EDITOR'S NOTE

We hope you enjoyed this edition of "The Upbeat." Feel free to share this newsletter with your friends, family and neighbors as well. We welcome any feedback, comments, or questions you may have. Please reach out to us at newsletter@assuredallies.com. If you prefer to receive this newsletter in electronic format, contact us as well.