

Disorientation result of new surroundings

Dear Jo: My mother, who is 78, was placed in a nursing home two weeks ago. Ever since her arrival there she has been terribly confused.

She seems to think she is living back in Georgia where she grew up. Sometimes she doesn't recognize any of her children. At other times she does and she is her old self again.

We don't quite know how to react to all this. Should we just go along with her, and humor her when she speaks in this confused manner, or what should we do?

— K.A.

Dear K.A.: No, do not go along with her and humor her when she speaks this way. Your mother is having a problem adjusting to her new and strange surroundings. She can be helped.

When you and the other family members visit, always tell her who you are and where she is. It is better for her to have just one or two visitors at a time as this is less distressing and less tiring.

Speak to her as you always have, keep her posted on the family news. Touch her when you talk to her. If your mother wears glasses or a hearing aid, make sure that they are hers and are in good condition.

Sometimes people become confused in a new setting because of sensory loss. When your mother speaks of still living in Georgia, gently correct her.

Possibly you could bring some of her personal belongings to the nursing home, for example, a chest-of-drawers, a comfortable chair and some family photographs. These personal items will help her to retain a sense of security and a continuation of the life she has known.

A calendar and a clock in her room would also be useful. When you visit her you can take her for walks around the home and take her out when the weather is good. Be patient and keep trying to get her to relate to the real world.

Dear Jo: I am presently in my sophomore year at the University of Michigan School of Nursing. As part of my out-clinical experience this term I am visiting (weekly) with a senior citizen in a nearby residential complex.

It is amazing how much I have learned. This association has caused me to reflect a lot on my own life and prospective old age.

There are a lot of things I hope I can prevent, and other things I am looking forward to enjoying. I don't think people realize, or take the time to see just how much they can learn from older people.

— J. Marovich

Dear J.: So much has transpired in the 65 plus years of a person's life. Yes, they can teach us a great deal. Thank you for your letter.

Dear Jo: I am in my 60s and lately I have noticed that my abdomen sticks out after I eat my meals. Is this a common concern in people my age?

— J.T.

Dear J.T.: This is a common problem. It is probably due to the delay of gastric emptying and diminished movement of nutrients in the bowel which is part of the aging process. Also the eating of fatty foods slows gastric mobility. A way to help this is to take a walk after eating a fairly heavy meal.

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