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Mountain View Family Caregivers Feel the Heat

Home Cooking for Seniors a Pressure Cooker of Stress for Caregivers of Older Adults

[MOUNTAIN VIEW, Calif.] Adult daughters – who typically serve as home cooks for seniors – are feeling the heat in the kitchen, according to a recent study of family caregivers. The stress is especially high for adult children who are caring and cooking for someone with several nutritional risk factors.

Research conducted for the local caregiving company Home Instead Senior Care revealed caring for an older person who has three or more nutritional risk factors is tied to increased stress levels. Of the caregivers who rated their lives as extremely stressful, 67 percent were caring for loved ones with three or more nutritional risk factors compared with 33 percent of caregivers whose seniors had fewer than three nutritional risk factors.¹

Adult children caring for an older adult (average age 81) reported the top three nutritional risks as:

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1. Three or more prescribed or over-the-counter drugs per day.
2. An illness or condition that made the senior change his or her diet.
3. Having lost or gained more than 10 pounds in the past six months without trying.²

That's why Home Instead Senior Care has partnered with national nutrition experts from the University of Maryland and Duke University Medical Center to promote healthy, stress-free grocery shopping and meal preparation tips and recipes for households in the Bay Area caring for seniors.

At the center of the campaign is the *Cooking Under Pressure* handbook that is available free through the local Home Instead Senior Care office. A Web site at www.foodsforseniors.com provides additional information, research and resources.

Local senior care expert Michelle Rogers owner of the Home Instead Senior Care office serving Mountain View said that risks associated with conditions such as medication use and illness can negatively impact seniors' health and independence as they age. "Good nutrition is, in fact, the first line of defense in helping to keep seniors healthy and independent," she said.

According to research, family caregivers are taking an active role in the lives of these seniors who need help, shopping and preparing meals for their older loved ones, which

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could be contributing to that stress, Rogers said. In the Home Instead Senior Care survey, 83 percent of family caregivers help with groceries or other errands; 65 percent assist with meal preparation.³

Experts advise stressed-out family caregivers to get organized by creating a shopping list so their seniors regularly have healthy ingredients (see the *12 Staples Your Senior Shouldn't Live Without*), collect interesting recipes and ensure their senior has the companionship they need to shop for groceries and make mealtimes enjoyable.

“Buy fresh ingredients and prepare meals with older adults, enticing them with what they like to eat. Bring in new recipes and ingredients; we all get in a rut,” said Dr. Nadine Sahyoun, associate professor in the Department of Nutrition and Food Science at the University of Maryland, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

“Make eating a happy event,” Dr. Sahyoun said. “We focus too much on what people can't eat and don't give enough attention to what food represents to us. Food is at the core of our lives – it's the smell, color, feel, texture and social context. All of this is what makes a meal enjoyable. We have to pay attention to those things,” she added.

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“If you’re a family caregiver, I think it’s really important not to act as the food police, watching and criticizing,” said Elisabetta Politi, nutrition director of the Duke

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Diet and Fitness Center at the Duke University Medical Center. “Ask, ‘Is there anything I can do to help you?’ Listen to seniors’ concerns. Maybe you want to go with them to shop.”

Home Instead Senior Care’s Rogers said that companionship is one ingredient that family caregivers don’t want to leave out of a senior’s meal plan. Companionship is vital to making mealtime more engaging for an older adult as well as in alleviating the strain on family caregivers. “So many seniors are alone or lonely. If you can’t be there to shop for groceries or eat with loved ones, consider a congregate meal site – such as a senior center – a meal delivery program or a paid companion to help encourage older adults to develop the kind of nutritional habits that will keep them healthy and give you peace of mind.”

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1,2,3. The Boomer Project (www.boomerproject.com) completed online interviews with 1,279 U.S. adult caregivers, ages 35-62, with a parent, stepparent or older relative for whom they or someone in their household provides care. Questions regarding nutritional risk factors and stress adapted from Abbott Laboratories' "Determine Your Nutritional Health" checklist. Used with the permission of Abbott Laboratories, copyright 2008.

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