



### **The Magic of Choice: Giving Seniors Options**

Imagine for a moment that for the remainder of the day, you're no longer able to drive. It wasn't your choice to give up your license, someone took the keys away from you and thus took away your independence, in the middle of the day. How do you plan to get home from work this evening? Perhaps you need to run a few errands, how do you manage to get to the store and back again? Sure, there are ride-sharing and grocery delivery services available, but most people would prefer the freedom of getting to and from their destinations on their own accord.

Now, imagine that for the rest of the day, you aren't allowed a single say in what your evening looks like. In fact, instead of having the choice to skip the gym after work, you're forced to participate in a new fitness class that's not your style. Then, you aren't given a choice regarding what to eat for dinner, nor the timing of it. Whether you're hungry or not, dinner is served at 6:00 pm sharp, and it's liver and onions. After dinner, you thought you'd catch up on your e-mail or watch television, but instead of relaxing, you're forced to take a shower because today is your shower day. Then after your shower, which is at 7:30 pm, you're put into bed for the rest of the night, even though you're wide awake and had hoped to visit with your family. Does this sound appealing to you?



Unfortunately, the scenario just described is how many seniors who rely on the assistance of caregivers, feel about their everyday routine. Whether the caregivers are family members or professionals, offering seniors a choice is something that is often overlooked. It's much easier for the caregiver to orient the day around their own schedule and to-do list, than it is to adapt a schedule based on the needs of the senior. After a while, the caregiver can easily forget to offer choice, especially as they become familiar with the preferences of the person they are caring for. While it's important that the caregiver is familiar with the likes and dislikes of their client or loved one, it's also important to continue to offer them a choice. In offering choices, the caregiver acknowledges the individuality of their client or loved one, while also giving them a

voice. Everyone wants to be heard and acknowledged, no matter their age or ability. Here are a few tips to incorporate more choice in the lives of seniors.

#### **Choice in Time**

The biggest way to empower seniors who rely on the assistance of caregivers is to allow them to structure their day. Sometimes there are outlier circumstances that need to be factored into the day, such as doctor appointments or a family caregiver's own routine and schedule, where the senior needs to be flexible in their daily plan. However, as much as possible, allow the senior to choose how their day looks. Ask them what time they would like help getting ready for the day, when they would like to eat meals, and what time works best for them when making appointments. Then, create a daily routine based on their preferences, and continue to offer choice when planning daily activities.

## **Choice in Clothing**

Another way to offer choice is to allow the senior to select their outfit for the day. This may seem like a no-brainer, but many caregivers can often overlook this simple choice. For seniors living with memory loss, choosing an outfit amongst many options in the closet is overwhelming. Instead, pick two appropriate outfits and allow them to select their preference.

## **Choice in Meals**

Meals are another opportunity to offer seniors choice. Before preparing a meal, ask your client or loved one for their input. If you're a family caregiver and preparing a meal for your entire family, ask your loved one if they would like what's on the menu tonight, or a back-up choice. Keep the pantry stocked with easy-to-make meals, such as ingredients for sandwiches, fresh produce, and soup, so that there are other options for your loved one if they choose. Even if you are familiar with the routine meals of your loved one or client, (say they always have grilled cheese and tomato soup on Tuesdays), ask them what they prefer to eat anyway. They might surprise you and want to try something new.

## **Choice in Activities**

Finally, give seniors choice in their everyday activities. While it's important to encourage socialization, physical movement, and other stimulating activities, forcing someone to do something they prefer not to do only leads to a disappointing experience for all involved. Instead of forcing an activity, give the choice between two similar activities that accomplish the same goal. For example, if your loved one or client needs to exercise, give them the choice between two active activities—would you like to go for a walk or ride the stationary bike today? When you allow your loved one or client to navigate their day, giving them choices along the way, you recognize their personhood.

At [Visiting Angels of Boulder County](#), we understand the importance of choice in our clients' lives. We recognize that each of our clients' needs are unique, which is why we create a personalized care plan for each of our care recipients. We won't tell you what time you need to shower or what time you need to schedule a doctor appointment to accommodate our caregivers. Our aim is to help seniors experience the joys of aging in place by giving them the support that they need to go about their daily routine. Learn more about how our aging in place services can provide your loved one with care and support. [Give us a call](#) today to schedule your free care consultation.

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