

UK Elder Care
IN THE KNOW
E-Newsletter
July 2008



A MESSAGE FROM THE COORDINATOR

Hope everyone is enjoying their summer! In July, we will be cancelling the CARE Group meetings, but they will resume in August. For future CARE Group meetings starting in August, we ask participants to RSVP in advance, so if you plan to invite a new-comer to a meeting or share information with a colleague about the meetings, please have them call Elder Care so we can notify them of any changes in the schedule and to add them to our CARE Group list-serve.



NEWS HIGHLIGHTS

Increased Risk of Institutionalization High Immediately After the Death of A Spouse

This study's objective was to analyze how the death of a spouse affects the probability of entering institutionalized care.

The 140,902 study participants included Finnish adults aged 65 years or older living with a spouse at the beginning of the study period. Participants were followed for the next five years--from January 1998 to December 2002.

Risk of institutionalization was particularly high immediately after the death of a spouse, demonstrating the importance of loss of social and instrumental support.

"These results provide indirect evidence of the effect of the loss of social and instrumental support on the risk of institutionalization," the study's authors stated.

"Furthermore, we found that high levels of education and income did not buffer the effects of bereavement."

Source: "Institutionalization of Older Adults After the Death of a Spouse,"
Elina Nihtila, Pekka Martikainen
American Journal of Public Health, 10.2105/AJPH.2007.119271

Gene/Stress Interaction Increases Cognitive Decline In Elderly

The negative effects of stress on cognitive functioning appear to be amplified by a genetic variation associated with Alzheimer's disease, a new federally funded study has found. The genetic variation may, in effect, accelerate the development of age-related cognitive decline by as much as eight years.

Researchers from the Baltimore Memory Study report in *The American Journal of Psychiatry (AJP)*, the official journal of the American Psychiatric Association, that a high level of the stress hormone cortisol in study participants aged 50 to 70 years was associated with worsened cognitive abilities. The researchers also found that the effect was greater among those with a common form of the gene for apolipoprotein E (APOE), which has been shown to increase the risk for Alzheimer's disease.

The effects on cognitive functioning extended to six of the seven areas that were studied: language, eye-hand coordination, executive functioning, verbal memory/learning, visual memory, and ability to copy a complex visual design.

The deficits are similar in magnitude to those seen with advancing age. The authors estimated the equivalent years of increased age, represented by the poorer cognition of the study participants with high cortisol and the epsilon-4 form of the APOE gene. For language ability, the lower scores of people with high cortisol levels and one epsilon-4 copy were comparable to an age increase of eight years. For those with two epsilon-4 copies, the comparable age increase was even larger.

The study was supported by the National Institute on Aging and the National Institutes of Health Division of Research Resources.

Source: www.medicalnewstoday.com



UPCOMING EVENTS ON CAMPUS & IN THE COMMUNITY

- ***CARE Group meetings in July have been cancelled, but will resume in August!***
- **Health & Wellness Events:** Walking Wednesday's each week you can meet at the corner of Rose and Washington at 12:10; Farmer's Market bus rides has begun every Tuesday. Visit www.uky.edu/HR/Wellness to learn about other services and scheduled events and to RSVP.



CAREGIVER SURVIVAL GUIDE

Is It Time to Take the Keys Away?

Caring for a loved one requires walking a fine line. We want our loved one to maintain as much freedom as possible while staying as safe as possible. One of the difficult decisions to make, keeping the previously mentioned goals in mind, is whether to let your elderly loved one get behind the wheel of his or her vehicle.

According to a WebMD article entitled "The Car Key Decision," one in eight drivers in America today are over 65 years old. One in five drivers will be over 65 in 25 years. That makes this issue a big deal.

According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, 12 states now require that older drivers renew their licenses more often than younger drivers. In Illinois, drivers 75 or older must take a road test each time they renew. Also, they must renew every two years starting at age 81, and once a year after 87. A similar bill in California last year brought about the typical politically correct opposition who called the bill "ageist." Ultimately the references to age were deleted.

One thing remains certain. It is not an easy subject to approach with a loved one, but concern for their safety overrides that. The main concerns for older drivers are cataracts, decreased reaction times, and loss of peripheral vision. There are operations now that can fix these eye problems. Reaction times can also be improved. Computer training sessions on making quick driving decisions can improve reaction times by sometimes 40% or greater. These programs are not yet widely available, but others are. The 55 and Alive class given by AARP helps sharpen seniors' driving skills.

However, there comes a time when most loved ones must be persuaded to give up their keys. While some give them up easily, most need persuasion by their doctor and you. If more drastic measures need to be taken, social workers, police officers, and the Department of Motor Vehicles may be enlisted to help. By filing a hazardous driver report with the DMV. They will revoke the license, and most people will comply--some with bitterness. This approach may appeal to the loved one's respect for authority figures.

This is by no means an easy issue or an easy task, but when the safety of your loved one is at stake, all the stops must be pulled out.

Source: Caregiver.com Weekly Newsletter May 2008 Issue #380; Author Michael Plontz



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