

# How to Encourage Independence in Older Adults

## How can you support an older adult with their independence?

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### **The Importance of Independence in Older Adults**

Older adults are more vulnerable to losing their independence due to mobility issues, behavioral health conditions resulting in isolation from others, and limited financial income. Ensuring older adults maintain their independence keeps them functioning at optimal levels by (1) giving them purpose, (2) maintaining their balance and strength, (3) supporting their cognitive skills including memory, (4) promoting a sense of self-worth, and (5) assisting them in developing positive relationships with caregivers, medical personnel, and family members.

As adults age, their daily living activities decline over time leading to declines in mental and physical health, thereby, increasing their risk for chronic health conditions.

According to the 2010 study *Aging in Place: A State Survey of Livability Policies and Procedures*, 90% of seniors indicated they wish to age in place in their homes (<https://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/ppi/liv-com/aging-in-place-2011-full.pdf>).

Increased independence in older adults including autonomy and decision making has multiple benefits including (1) less hospital stays, (2) reduced likelihood of dementia, (3) and improved quality of life.

### **What causes lack of independence in older adults?**

There are several main risk factors causing a loss of independence in the adult population including:

- Inadequate living conditions
- Lack of access to resources
- Social isolation and loneliness
- Poor mental and physical health
- Inability to drive or leave their homes

### **How can you support an older adult who lacks independence?**

Older adults often become highly frustrated and depressed when they can no longer do things for themselves. They are consumed with anxiety over a constant fear of injury and accidentally bringing harm to themselves. The best way for us to support older adults in maintaining their independence is to help them make necessary safety

modifications designed to protect them and enhance their lives. Some essential in-home safety modifications include grab rails, chair lifts, ramps, and modified kitchen utensils.

In addition to safety modifications, we can help older adults remain limber by promoting movement; there are many light aerobic classes for seniors, and they can still go for walks in they are mobile. If, however, a senior has lost their mobility, you can support them with a mobility scooter; this will still allow them to get outdoors and socialize with family and peers.

It is also imperative to combat isolation by arranging to social interactions at senior centers or through volunteers where they can become involved in social activities and hobbies.

Most importantly, we need to work on altering their state of mind. We want our older adults to be treated with love and respect, so they feel valued, not like a burden. The best way to do this is to teach them how to control the people with whom they surround themselves, those that build them up rather than tear them down.

Remember, older adults have already lived a full life, having had successful careers, and raising families. They still have their own opinions and things they prefer. When engaging with an older adult and helping them to make decision, it is essential to provide them with choices. Proving older adults with choices will give them a sense of self-control and build self-esteem.

## **RESOURCES**

- A. <https://prestigehomecareorlando.com/fostering-independence-in-older-parents/>
- B. <https://vantageaging.org/blog/independence-is-important-for-seniors/>
- C. <https://www.familyresourcehomecare.com/why-is-independence-important-to-seniors/>
- D. <https://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/ppi/liv-com/aging-in-place-2011-full.pdf>