

Fact Sheet #

Ageing Parents: 10 things to know for an emergency

It only takes a few minutes to collect and write down this vital information. And it can save precious time in an emergency.

"Sometimes a parent isn't able to give medical information when an emergency arises, so emergency medical personnel must rely on the adult children or a spouse for that information," says Paul Takahashi, M.D. (a specialist in geriatrics at Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minn.)

Below — in order of importance — is a list of 10 things you need to know about your ageing parents.

1. Names of their doctors.

If you don't know anything else, this is probably the most important piece of information. Why? Chances are good that your parents' doctors can provide much of the rest of the information needed as well as more details about your parents' specific health histories.

2. Birth dates.

Often medical records and insurance information are catalogued according to birth date. This can improve communication in an emergency or a crisis.

3. List of allergies.

This is especially important if one of your parents is allergic to medication — penicillin, for example.

4. Advance directives. *

An advance directive is a formal document that outlines a person's decisions about his or her health care, such as whether or not resuscitation efforts should be made and the use of life-support machines. While there is no legislation covering advance directives in NSW- these documents are likely to have a strong influence on health care providers when making treatment decisions

5. Major medical problems.

This includes such diseases as diabetes or heart disease.

6. List of medications.

It's especially important that a doctor know if your parent uses blood thinners.

7. Religious beliefs.

This is particularly important in case blood transfusions are needed.

8. Insurance information.

Know the name of your parents' health insurance provider and their policy numbers.

9. Prior surgery.

List past medical procedures, such as cardiac bypass surgery.

10. Lifestyle information.

Do your parents drink alcohol or use tobacco?

Knowing these 10 things should help you take care of your parents in an emergency.

* Contact COTA (NSW) - (02)9286 3860 (or free call for country NSW) 1800 449 102 for a free copy of the Advance Health Care Directive.