

Attachment: Look and See Signs of Frailty

In a women's study released last summer, researchers at Columbia and Johns Hopkins Universities discovered the important role activity plays in the fight against frailty and shed new light on what causes the condition.

Linda P. Fried, M.D., M.P.H., and scientists found that frailty is the result of a systems failure in older adults, rather than a specific problem, disease or even chronological age. Data from women ages 70-79 led researchers to discover that half of those frail had three or more systems at abnormal levels, compared with 25 percent of the pre-frail and 16 percent of the non-frail population. Among the physiological factors that were assessed included anemia, inflammation and fine motor skills.

Solutions to address frailty including medications and hormone replacement are unlikely to prevent frailty unless they are designed to improve multiple systems, Dr. Fried noted. "This may explain the importance of approaches such as remaining physically active as we get older, since activity improves many aspects of biology and overall health."

So how do family caregivers know what to look for? Following, from Stephanie Studenski, M.D., M.P.H., University of Pittsburgh geriatrician and researcher, and Home Instead Senior Care, are the signs that a senior might be becoming frail:

Change. If a senior has always been interested in talking to the neighbors, reading the newspaper or volunteering and is withdrawing from those interests, suggest your loved one see a doctor.

Inactivity. If your senior family member suddenly becomes less active, investigate what could be the cause.

Slowing down. If grandpa always used to have a bounce in his step and now, suddenly, trudges along, that's a bad sign.

Loss of appetite and weight. A senior who always had a healthy appetite and doesn't any more should be of concern to their loved ones.

Unsteadiness. Loss of balance comes with aging, but an increasing unsteadiness is a sign that something could be wrong.

To find out how you can help keep a senior active, contact Home Instead Senior Care for free *Get Mom Moving Activity Cards*: "Activities for the Mind Body and Soul." Or go to the <http://www.getmommoving.com/activities-mind-body-soul/activity-calendar> [Get Mom Moving Web site] to download the Activities booklet and Activity Calendar to track progress day by day.