

Supporting Health & Well-Being as Your Loved One Ages

Why This Matters

As people with autism and intellectual or developmental disabilities live longer, their health and well-being needs change. Families play a critical role in noticing early changes, encouraging healthy habits, and partnering with healthcare providers. With the right support, your loved one can live a healthier, fuller life at every stage.

National Statistics

- Autistic adults have an increased risk for medical conditions related to aging, such as cardiovascular disease and neurologic disease
- Autistic individuals are at greater risk for dementia- up to 3x the risk.

Everyday Wellness Tips for Families

Based on best practices and the C-SMILE approach shared by UNC experts:

- **Calming Routines:** Create a predictable daily schedule to reduce stress and support emotional well-being.
- **Sleep Health:** Aim for consistent bedtimes, calming nighttime routines, and a sleep-friendly environment.
- **Movement & Exercise:** Encourage daily activity — walking, dancing, or even virtual reality-based programs like those Bancroft is piloting.
- **Inclusive Nutrition:** Simple, balanced meals and opportunities to help with cooking encourage independence and healthy eating.

What Families Can Watch For

- Changes in **behavior, mood, or engagement**
- New difficulties with movement, swallowing, or sleep
- Increased agitation or withdrawal from favorite activities
- Subtle changes noticed by direct support staff or peers

If you see these changes, share them with your loved one's doctor. Early conversations can make a big difference.

Partnering With Healthcare Providers

- Keep a **health journal** of observations (sleep, appetite, mood, movement). Share specific changes, for instance, “he used to help cook, now he is not interested”.
- Ask your provider about **routine screenings** for heart health, bone health, and cognitive function.
- Don't hesitate to bring in **specialists**. Bancroft partners with Cooper University Health Care to bring primary care directly to the people we support.

You're Not Alone

Bancroft and the Collaborative are here to partner with families every step of the way with resources, research and best practices.



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