

# HELPFUL HINTS FOR SENIORS

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## *A Plan that Works*

**John and Mary will be 75 this year.** They have been married for nearly 50 years and their kids and grandkids live all over the United States. Both are in fairly good health with the usual issues: a bit of arthritis and hypertension. But retirement hasn't slowed them down. They enjoy a full range of social and family events. Both volunteer in the community and at church. John enjoys golf and gardening; and Mary loves to swim and walk. They both drive. They love to dine out, love the symphony, enjoy dancing with their friends, and travel to see their grandkids. The Smiths have recently come to a big decision. Like scores of similar couples, they have created a plan for themselves with the following goals in mind:

- to maximize the quality of their retirement lifestyle,
- to support the things they enjoy,
- to provide the best possibility to live together as long as possible,
- to minimize the stress on themselves and their kids that can arise from a health crisis or the need for a sudden change of lifestyle
- to simplify and eliminate unnecessary maintenance chores and costs.

John and Mary are moving to a senior retirement community that has what they call a "continuum of care". (Similar to the homes at Arbor Ridge in Rhinebeck), they have chosen a large and beautiful *independent-living* apartment. When they are home, they will enjoy all of the social events, the health and fitness programs, the indoor pool, and the fine dining. John plans to golf as much as he can and maintain a garden; Mary has already been invited to the book club, the walking club, and the monthly ladies luncheon. Next month they are planning to go with the group to the symphony. Without some of the maintenance and security issues associated with their large, 4 bedroom house, they are planning to travel several weeks a year to see the family, visit friends, and golf.

**John and Mary will be 80 this year.** Nowadays, they are both so grateful for the decision they made. John tells people it's like they are living on a cruise ship that never moves. The comfortable amenities and the freedom of *independent living* are just what they wanted. Lately, John has developed some macular degeneration and Mary is doing all of the driving. John has noticed that Mary is beginning to have some memory issues that are more than the usual "senior moments" everyone laughs about. It is really nothing they need to worry about, since they can jump on the community bus anytime they need to go to the drugstore, shopping mall, doctor's office or grocery. Both of them have decided the time is right for them to join a memory support group. They love their friends, and they love having everything available including the beauty shop, volunteer opportunities, movies, get-togethers and activities, especially on those days when they just don't feel like going out in the ice and snow.

**John and Mary will be 85 this year.** For nearly ten years they have enjoyed independence, comfort, and a meaningful, active lifestyle while at the same time avoiding situations that have been so difficult for some of their friends from the old neighborhood. One took a tumble down the stairs. Another is traveling back and forth to the nursing home each day to visit his wife. Another has had to stop going to church altogether, and another cannot leave the house, and certainly cannot travel to see her grandkids, because she must provide twenty-four hour care for her husband.

Not that it has all been easy. John's eyesight has worsened considerably. Because their community offered excellent health seminars dealing with macular degeneration,

John was able to utilize state-of-the-art technology to ameliorate his condition. Last year, Mary needed a hip replacement surgery which was a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it was great the way their friends and the staff provided so much support to both of them. Mary came back to the *skilled nursing* part of the community after her hospital stay and she completed her rehab right here. John and many of her friends were able to walk over and visit. John and Mary ate every meal together. She made a good recovery, but her strength hasn't been the same and the anesthesia did affect her memory to the point that things have lately become a little more serious. John has an incredibly positive outlook on life and their days are still filled with laughter and meaning. They never miss the ladies luncheon or the guy's night out. Dinner is still the social event of the day and church is very important. John has been doing a great job this year to make sure Mary has everything she needs. Because they have others to do the day-to-day maintenance, transportation, cooking and cleaning, John and Mary are doing just fine. John even has time for a few rounds of golf with his buddies.

**John just recently turned 90.** Because of his macular degeneration, John has decided it is time to move to *assisted living*. These days, he uses a walker. Otherwise he is just as active as ever. He lives in a sunny, simple apartment where all of his meals are provided, he gets weekly linen service, and a gal stops by every day to help him open the correct medicine bottles. John feels safe that there are always certified nurses and assistants to check up on him several times a day, and he can ask for a little help when he needs it for dressing, showering, or using the bathroom. He still rides the bus to attend a concert or go to a game with his friends. And he still has a smile for everyone.

John recalls fondly the last six months of Mary's life. After another fall, two years ago, John and the family had decided she was the safest in the *long-term care* part of the community. She lived in a nice semi-private room, and John and Mary ate together in the dining room every day until Mary needed hospice care. Because he didn't need all that space, John had chosen a smaller *independent living* apartment for himself. John was gratified by the way so many of his friends and the staff honored them both as valuable members of the community. John was with her at the end. Now John's days are still full. The pace may be a bit slower, but the warmth and the friendship are just as strong.

People say that John is an inspiration to them because he can always make them laugh and he has a smile for everyone. The care assistants say he is a special sort of character. John tells people that he may be a character...but he couldn't have done it alone. Because of his retirement community, he never was.