



Senior Series

A partnership between Ohio State University Extension
and Ohio Aging Network professionals



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When Seniors Relocate

Older adults who relocate usually do so as a result of life opportunities (such as retirement), life changes (such as widowhood), and health changes. Although most older adults prefer to "age in place" or stay in their current home and neighborhood, this may not be an option for everyone.

Factors that influence the decision to relocate include:

- Distance from family and friends.
- Access to amenities such as recreation, health, and leisure activities.
- Familiarity with the region or environment.
- Need for assistance with daily activities.
- Desire for fewer home maintenance responsibilities.

Types of Moves

There are usually three types of moves that occur for older adults. Each

can be affected by the adult's health and mobility as well as other factors.

The first move tends to occur primarily among persons in their sixties who are healthy and have adequate retirement incomes. The motivation for the move may be to leave the negative features of the former residence, as well as to be close to the attractive features of the new residence, such as better climate, facilities, and services. Friendships with adults who have already moved or the opportunity to be closer to family may be other motivations. If leaving nearness to family, ties are often maintained at a distance through periodic visits and telephone or letter contacts.

The second move is usually at a time when adults have a chronic disability that creates difficulty in carrying out everyday household tasks, such as shopping, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of finances. The move usually involves an increasing need for regular support, yet a desire to continue living independently.

The third move occurs as a result of a severe illness or disability that requires more care than can be provided in the home by family members, homemaker services, nursing care services, or adult day care. This move is usually to an assisted living or skilled nursing facility.

Adjusting to Relocation

Each relocation involves various adjustments and common questions usually arise:

- How will I meet and make new friends?
- Will I find a new physician, pharmacist, gardener, library, etc.?
- Will I have regrets about leaving?
- Will I like my new neighborhood?
- Will I be a burden to my family?

Adapting to a new environment requires the establishment of new friendships, new routines, and time to become familiar with a new physical environment. Many positive experiences can occur following a move. At the same time, less positive and sometimes unexpected reactions may also occur, particularly after a move from a long-time residence. Some examples might include:

- Disorientation.
- Idealization of the new or lost environment.
- Anger or depression.
- Confusion, illness, or grief.

The degree of adjustment to a new home may depend on older adults' involvement in planning for the move, feeling prepared to move, their perception of the new environment, and how comfortable they feel in their new home.

Community and Recreational Services

It is important for older adults who move to explore the community services and recreational opportunities that are available in their new neighborhoods. Community services may include yard services, transportation services, home maintenance support, homemaking services, and companionship programs. The services utilized will vary widely depending on the physical and mental capabilities of the older adult. The recreational options will also vary depending on the size and resources available in the local community. Healthy, independent-living older adults may explore volunteer prospects, educational programs, employment services, senior center programs, social clubs, and mentoring opportunities.

Community-based services for adults who require more care due to increasing dependence include: home-delivered meals, homemaker services, visiting nurse services, transportation prospects, friendly visitor support services, adult day care programs, telephone hotlines or contact services, respite care, support groups, and rehabilitation facilities.

Coping With the Change of Relocating

Moving has many complex implications and can significantly affect the lives of older adults. Most seniors have lived in their homes for more than twenty years. As a result, relocating presents challenges to establish new connections to community, friends, and family. An awareness of the community services available can help with this adjustment process. Seniors adapt more easily to an environment that fits their current abilities and enables them to feel a sense of control over their environment. Following any move, it is important to take time to become familiar with one's surroundings and to make an effort to meet and become involved in the new community.

Moving into a new residence has a special meaning for each individual. For older adults, the perception of “home” usually includes good neighbors, friends, and memories. Security, comfort, and integrity of the individual are important to maintain as the older adult considers relocation.

References

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- Cavanaugh, J.C., & Blanchard-Fields, F. (2002). *Adult Development & Aging* (4th Ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishers.

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