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Something Needs to Change

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SENIOR LIVING GUIDE

Celebrating Family Caregivers and Smiles That Last

» BY JULIE ROSE

November is National Family Caregivers Month. It's a time to honor the consistent, quiet heroes who make daily life possible for our loved ones.



JULIE ROSE

It's also the time of year when we recognize lesser-known days. National Geriatric Tooth Fairy Day on Nov. 9 was one of those days. Together these days remind us that even the smallest acts of care – a warm meal, a listening ear, or a reminder to brush make an enormous difference to our loved ones over time.

FAMILY CAREGIVERS ARE UNSUNG HEROES

We understand firsthand the dedication it takes to manage appointments, medications, finances and emotional well-being, often while needing to tend to other family obligations.

This month, we encourage caregivers to take a moment for yourselves. As the saying goes – you can't pour from an

empty cup.

Even if you need to schedule time on your calendar, it's important to make space for five minutes of deep breathing, stepping outside for sunlight or enjoying your coffee without multitasking so you can recharge. This is much more beneficial than you may realize.

WHY ORAL HEALTH MATTERS MORE THAN YOU THINK

While we may outgrow the Tooth Fairy, good oral care remains a cornerstone of health throughout life. Studies show that oral hygiene directly impacts cardiovascular health, diabetes management and even cognitive function. As we age, these areas become more sensitive.

These items have a significant impact:

- Help your loved one schedule dental visits every six months.
- Encourage brushing twice a day. Electric toothbrushes can make brushing easier for those with limited dexterity.
- Ask the dentist if additional fluoride treatments are recommended to provide added protection.

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AARP to Hold Caregiver Re-Treat in Haymarket

Family caregivers in Northern Virginia are invited to take a pause as AARP Virginia hosts a Caregiver Re-Treat in Haymarket, blending relaxation, inspiration and connection for those who dedicate themselves to caring for loved ones.

The events coincide with National Family Caregivers Month, when AARP Virginia highlights the challenges and contributions of caregivers through community gatherings and online programs.

"Family caregivers across Virginia help their older parents, spouses and other loved ones live independently in their homes and in their communities – where they want to be," said Joyce Williams, AARP Virginia state president.

"Family caregivers face significant challenges, both financially, emotionally and physically," she added. "They do it

all, from bathing and meal preparation to managing medications, arranging transportation and handling medical or nursing tasks with little to no training."

The Haymarket Caregivers' Re-Treat, "The Power of Purpose," will be Nov. 19 from 2-6 p.m. at the Haymarket Gainesville Library, 14870 Lightner Road in Haymarket.

The afternoon retreat includes:

- A screening of "The Hidden Power of Purpose"
- A keynote by Lily Liu
- Chair yoga, breathing exercises, creative activities and reflection
- Time to share stories and build community

Dinner will be provided. Caregivers may attend all or part of the program. Register at <https://events.aarp.org/care1119>.

UVA Discovers Why Alzheimer's Patients Forget Family and Friends

One of the most devastating moments for family members of a patient with Alzheimer's is when their loved one forgets who they are.

New University of Virginia School of Medicine research may explain why that happens and could lead to a way to prevent it, according to a news release.

Dr. Harald Sontheimer, graduate student Lata Chaunsali and their colleagues found that the failure to recognize family, friends and caregivers is caused by the breakdown of protective "nets" that surround neurons in the brain. Preventing the loss of these nets in lab mice protected the mice from losing their memories of previous social interactions.

The results offer a target for the development of new treatments to benefit Alzheimer's patients, the researchers say.

"Finding a structural change that explains a specific memory loss in Alzheimer's is very exciting," said Sontheimer, chair of UVA's Department of Neuroscience and member of the UVA Brain Institute. "It is a completely new target, and we already have suitable drug candidates in hand."

A GROWING PROBLEM

Alzheimer's affects 55 million people around the world, and that number is expected to grow by 35% in the next five years alone.

In response, UVA has established the Harrison Family Translational Research Center in Alzheimer's and Neurodegenerative Diseases as part of its Paul and Diane Manning Institute of Biotechnology. The institute aims to accelerate the development of new treatments and cures for some of the world's most challenging diseases, including Alzheimer's.

Sontheimer's new work sheds important light on the development of the disease. He and his team previously revealed the importance of what are called "perineuronal nets" in the brain. These net-like structures surround nerve cells called neurons and perform a critical barrier function that lets neurons communicate correctly. These communications allow the neurons to form and store new memories.

Based on those results, Sontheimer and his collaborators suspected that disruptions of the nets could be a critical turning point in Alzheimer's. Their latest work

bears that out: The scientists found that lab mice that had faulty nets lost their ability to remember other mice – their "social memory" – even as they could still form new memories of objects in their environment. This mirrors what is seen in people with Alzheimer's, where social memory often fails before object memory.

STAVING OFF DEGRADATION

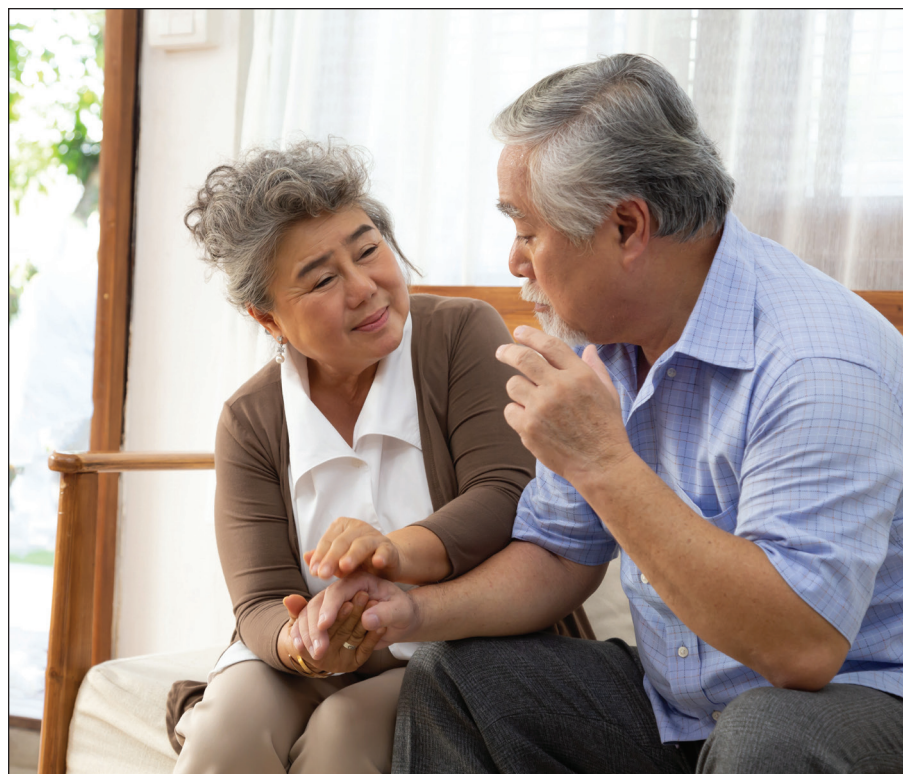
Sontheimer and his team then used "MMP inhibitors" – a class of drugs already being investigated for their potential to treat cancer and arthritis – to see if they could prevent the loss of the perineuronal nets. It worked. The approach staved off the degradation of the nets and preserved the mice's social memory.

"In Alzheimer's disease, people have trouble remembering their family and friends due to the loss of a memory known as social memory. We found that the net-like coating known as perineuronal nets protects these social memories. In our research with mice, when we kept these brain structures safe early in life, the mice suffering from this disease were better at remembering their social interactions," Chaunsali said. "Our research will help us get closer to finding a new, non-traditional way to treat – or, better yet, prevent – Alzheimer's disease, something that is much needed today."

The changes the scientists saw in the mice's brains align with those seen in human patients with Alzheimer's, suggesting that targeting the nets in people could provide similar benefits. Developing a treatment based on the findings will require additional research, but Sontheimer and Chaunsali are hopeful about what the future could hold.

"Although we have drugs that can delay the loss of perineuronal nets, and thereby delay memory loss in disease, more research needs to be done regarding safety and effectiveness of our approach before this can be considered in humans," Sontheimer said. "One of the most interesting aspects of our research is the fact that the loss of perineuronal nets observed in our studies occurred completely independent of amyloid and plaque pathology, adding to the suspicion that those protein aggregates may not be causal of disease."

The researchers have published their findings in the journal *Alzheimer's &*



New research from the University of Virginia School of Medicine may help explain why Alzheimer's patients forget family and friends.

Dementia: The Journal of the Alzheimer's Association. The article is open access, meaning it is free to read. The research team consisted of Chaunsali, Jiangtao Li,

Erik Fleischel, Courtney E. Prim, Izabela Kasprzak, Shan Jiang, Silky Hou, Miguel Escalante, Elise C. Cope, Michelle L. Olsen, Bhanu P. Tewari and Sontheimer.



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A clean smile often means more confidence, better nutrition and improved overall health.

At Paladin Life Care, we celebrate the families who show up day after day to care for, comfort and advocate for their loved ones. Let's honor caregivers everywhere and remember that health isn't just about big decisions – it results from the small, consistent

moments of care that keep our loved ones thriving.

Please reach out if you have questions about supporting your loved one's care plan. We're glad to help.

Julie Rose, M.Ed., CDP, CHC, CAPS, is CEO of Paladin Life Care, providing exceptional care and advocacy for senior clients and those with disabilities in Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia.