



## Caring for Someone with Arthritis

Most of the over 100 types of arthritis are either degenerative (osteoarthritis) or inflammatory (rheumatoid). All conditions cause pain, mobility issues and fatigue and can impact a person's ability to do everyday tasks. Caregivers can help by trying to:

**Understand the disease.** Learn as much as you can about your loved one's specific arthritis so you better understand their challenges and how to best help. Recognize that arthritis is unpredictable and often flares up and settles back down for no clear reason. This can make your loved one irritable, angry and depressed. Your patience and understanding will help them cope with these challenging emotions.

**Focus on the positive.** Focus on abilities rather than struggles. A positive outlook boosts self-confidence and can motivate activity. While it's tempting to help as much as you can, this can actually decrease your loved one's abilities and self-esteem.

**Encourage good choices.** A well-balanced diet will help your loved one's joints stay as mobile as possible and help maintain a healthy body weight. Some food choices—including tart cherries, turmeric, fatty fish, garlic and broccoli—have also been proven to reduce inflammation.

**Reach out.** Help with daily tasks and personal care can be offered through home care providers like VHA. In many cases, people are more willing to let a professional offer additional support than family or friends.

See more caring tips at [www.familycaregiving.ca](http://www.familycaregiving.ca)



## Instincts, Advocacy and Love: A Client and Family Voice Partner's Inspiring Journey

Mona Ismail has spent the last nine years providing around-the-clock care for the people she loves. After her father-in-law, Moosa, became lost and disoriented on a walk around the neighbourhood it was clear he was experiencing the signs of dementia.

Following a confirmed Alzheimer's diagnosis, Mona left her job as a caterer to care for him. "I loved my father-in-law. He was my friend and my family. He was such a people person and a real character. He loved music and dancing and made everyone around him happy," says Mona. "I wanted to do everything I could to make his life a little easier. It wasn't planned and it wasn't a choice."

### Trusting her Gut

As his health declined, Mona, who had no prior caregiving experience, jumped right in. Despite a phobia of needles and medical procedures, Mona went to workshops, consulted Moosa's doctor, read, researched and learned everything she could about Alzheimer's and managing Moosa's diabetes. Mona says that this research led her to, "start a program at home, with lots of trial and error to see how I could improve Moosa's symptoms and his comfort level."

Mona took over Moosa's diet, put him on an exercise regimen and worked with his doctor to reevaluate his long list of medications. Mona believes that these lifestyle changes eventually led to the doctor replacing insulin injections with pills. "Our doctor was shocked. It was a eureka moment for me," notes Mona.

It was during this time that Mona was first connected to VHA's services. Personal Support Workers (PSWs) helped with Moosa's morning and evening care routines and home support workers accompanied him on his daily walks. Mona calls her VHA support workers "soldiers on the ground." "It's a very special job and I don't know what I would have done without them. The support I received went above and beyond. They never seemed rushed or worried about getting to their next client and they always checked in on me too."

One of the biggest learning moments for Mona came after Moosa experienced recurring and serious chest infections. Mona knew these infections were related to his lack of appetite and obvious discomfort eating—despite being dismissed by doctors. "People are afraid to go with their instincts and question their doctor's opinions. You have to keep pushing. You know your loved one more than anyone else and you need to believe in yourself when something feels off," she passionately notes. Her instincts were right after it was confirmed that brain deterioration had affected his swallowing abilities and food and fluids were being aspirated into his lungs. Switching to pureed food and thickened water completely eliminated these infections.

After nearly six years living with Alzheimer's, Moosa passed away. While Mona recognizes how difficult, and grueling it was to care for him, "Moosa's death was very peaceful. He passed away with dignity," Mona says. "We were right there with him and he was still smiling. It made it all worth it. It was such a beautiful experience." Mona's dedicated and loving care for her father-in-law was recognized in 2016 with a VHA Heart of Home Care Award.

With no break between her caregiving roles, Mona is now supporting her mother-in-law Fatima who has early dementia. Fatima follows the same healthy diet and exercise regimen as her husband did and Mona has added activities to keep her brain active. Fatima and Mona work on math and English books every day, Fatima reads out loud regularly and is still responsible for chores around the home. "Every day at 7:00PM my mother-in-law puts the washed dishes away. It all has to do with brain and movement. People laugh, but I think it's like Tai Chi. All parts are at work: wrists, fingers and hands," Mona chuckles.

### Representing the Client Voice

Mona's commitment and passion to her caregiving role has led her to become an active member of the VHA community as a Client and Family Voice Partner. "It's so encouraging that VHA values my feedback. I feel heard and appreciated," she says.

As a Client and Family Voice Partner, Mona has been leading team meetings with our PSWs to offer suggestions on how to continually improve care and communication with families. Mona recognizes the unparalleled demands of PSWs and wants them to know that this does not go unnoticed. "I personally watched angels walk through my door every morning and PSWs need to be recognized for the job that they do," Mona adds.

Mona is also a member of our **Cognitive and Impairment Committee** and on the selection panel for our **Heart of Home Care Awards**. "I never dreamt I'd be on a committee and I'm so proud to represent the client voice," says Mona. "The idea that whatever I've learned through my experiences can potentially help someone else makes me really happy," she says.



## Become a client partner like Mona!

VHA is always looking to improve. Share your voice and join the conversation. If you would like to share your thoughts and become a Client and Family Partner at VHA, please contact **Stacey Ryan** at 647-460-8595 or [sryan@vha.ca](mailto:sryan@vha.ca) for more information.



# VHA Playdate Program Receives a Boost from Emajjin Foundation's Annual Fundraising Gala

Emajjin Children's Foundation's annual fundraising gala was a smashing success and helped raise thousands of dollars in support of VHA's Playdate program. Emajjin partners with organizations that enhance the lives of children to help them reach their full potential. This year's Denim and Diamonds theme celebrated the playfulness of the program attendees and was the biggest fundraiser by the foundation yet. There was a great turnout of VHA staff—including members of the VHA Playdate team who were generously sponsored to attend the \$125 event by VHA's Board of Directors.

"We pitched Playdate to the Emajjin board to be recipients of funds raised at their 2018 gala and were absolutely thrilled to be selected," says Dr. Kathryn Nichol, Vice President of Quality, Best Practice, Research and Education and Chief Nursing Executive at VHA. "We know we'll be able to run Playdate at least once, and maybe—because of additional funds raised through the silent/live auctions and other event activities—even twice, in 2019. That's incredible news, especially since we already have a waiting list of children, families and staff eager to join Playdate," she adds.

**The VHA Playdate program was co-developed with client and caregiver partners who are parents of children with complex medical needs. This ensured that the resulting program would meet the unique needs of these families.**

#### About VHA Playdate:

VHA Playdate is a unique program that gives kids with complex medical needs a rare and much-needed opportunity to come together and socialize, play and just have fun as kids should—all under caring supervision from skilled caregivers who are trained to work with medically fragile children.

The VHA Playdate program was co-developed with client and caregiver partners who are parents of children with complex medical needs. This ensured that the resulting program would meet the unique needs of these families. A pilot of the program ran for two six-week sessions in the fall of 2016 to rave reviews. The following year Playdate returned for one more session in 2017. VHA has since been seeking funding to make the program permanent. With the Emajjin Foundation's donation, we are excited to be able to run more Playdates and hopefully expand to different locations.

Learn more about Playdate at [www.vha.ca/playdate](http://www.vha.ca/playdate).  
For more on the Emajjin Children's Foundation, visit [www.emajjin.org](http://www.emajjin.org).



A group of personal support works, nurses and occupational therapists that were involved in the Playdate program came out together to enjoy the gala and share stories with attendees.



VHA's Quality and Best Practice, Research, and Education (Q-BPRE) team at the Denim and Diamonds gala!



Colleen Beaumont, a PSW who attended the gala, is shown above sharing a moment with a VHA client during a Playdate session in 2017.



## Be sure to spread the love, not the flu!

With the beautiful fall colours and the crisp fresh air also comes the dreaded flu season. The flu can be annoying for healthy adults. But for young children, those living with health conditions or older adults, the flu can be downright deadly. To fight the flu, visit your doctor, pharmacist, or local flu clinic for a flu shot; wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water; and keep hand sanitizer handy throughout the flu season.

**Loved our newsletter? Thought we missed something? Want to be profiled or contribute?** We're interested in hearing your ideas, stories and suggestions! Email [communications@vha.ca](mailto:communications@vha.ca) or call **416-489-2500 ext. 4344**, toll free at **1-888-314-6622 ext. 4344**. We want to hear from you!

We're All Ears!

