

Health and Human Sciences

AGING WELL

One in a series that focuses on improving outcomes for seniors and their families.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Caring for Yourself While Caring for Others

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Caring for the needs of older adults who are unable to care for themselves is hard. Many caregivers do not feel prepared for this role. If you provide care for an older adult, you are not alone. More than 44 million Americans provide care to someone over age 50.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CARING FOR YOURSELF

Caring for others is rewarding but can also be stressful when added to busy schedules and daily demands. The best way to help others is to take care of yourself. Some ways to help you avoid burnout include:

- Join a support group with other caregivers who understand what you are going through. It helps to know you are not alone. Hearing others share their experiences gives you an idea of what is to come.
- Don't try to do it all. Ask friends, family, and health professionals for help. If you belong to a faith community, dedicated support persons may be available.
- Take time for yourself. Take breaks from caregiving and do things you enjoy on a regular basis.
- Exercise regularly, eat right, and get enough rest. Do not feel guilty taking care of yourself. You will take better care of others in the long run if you care for yourself.
- Maintain your close personal relationships. Avoid isolation.
- Keep a journal. Some people find writing down their positive and negative feelings and experiences help to reduce stress.
- If caregiving has become highly stressful, talk with a healthcare provider or consider counseling.

FACING THE CHALLENGES OF CARING FOR ANOTHER

Caring for someone with complex needs includes making decisions and facing challenges that can be overwhelming. By planning ahead, you can be more realistic about what to expect. Start with a diagnosis. Learn as much as you can about the disease(s) and the process. This will help you understand what will happen, what is safe, and what to look for if something is wrong. Get a nurse to teach you the tasks that you will do at home — and a phone number to call for any questions. You may want to attend a support group for your loved one's condition.

Talk about their wishes on subjects such as driving, living arrangements, and financial and legal matters, including advanced directives before the disease progresses. Consider inviting other caregivers to this meeting. By keeping conversations open and involving the person and caregivers whenever possible, you will be able to better prepare for the future.

Be positive, flexible, and maintain a sense of humor. Avoid situations that can cause stress. You may at some point accept that you have reached your limit and want to know what other options are available.

TYPES OF CARE FOR ADULTS

There may come a time when the person you are assisting can no longer manage safely at home alone, or the care needed is more than you can give. Admitting that you need help may be the best thing that you can do for this person. It does not mean that you have failed. Many resources are available, ranging from in-home care to facilities that offer around-the-clock nursing care.

- Adult day care centers
- Transportation services
- Case managers
- Electronic home alert systems
- Respite care (temporary breaks for caregivers, usually less than 2 weeks)
- Home health aides, care companions, or nurses
- Home delivered meal programs
- Housing in a senior citizen community
- Housing in assisted living centers that offer assistance with various activities of daily living
- Housing in facilities that offer 24-hour skilled nursing services, such as nursing homes



The best choice will depend on the needs of the individual. It is important to consider the level of disability, safety needs, services required, personal preference, and, sometimes, financial coverage.

Caring for another involves many sacrifices, but you do not have to do it alone. It is important to maintain a healthy balance for both the older adults and the caregiver. Many resources exist to help you in your role as the caregiver.

VALUABLE RESOURCES FOR CAREGIVERS

Family Caregiver Alliance

(415) 434-3388
(800) 445-8106
www.caregiver.org

Area Agency on Aging

www.n4a.org/

Eldercare Locator

(800) 677-1116
www.eldercare.gov

AGIS

www.agis.com

AARP

(888) 687-2277
community.aarp.org/t5/Caregiving/ct-p/Caregiving

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