

Caregivers Need to Care for Themselves



Millions of Americans help care for older adult family members or friends. But caregivers often don't identify themselves with this role. Whether you call yourself a caregiver, or simply a good friend or family member, you know that caring for an aging loved one has its rewards and its trials.

If you are a caregiver, or expect to be one someday, these are tips to help you cope.

Prepare for care

Have an honest talk about future caregiving plans with your loved ones. It's best to do this while they are still able to handle aspects of their daily lives. If you are an adult child caring for a parent and have siblings, ask the sibling who is most comfortable with the parent to talk to them about it. If you're caring for a spouse, start the conversation by sharing what you'd like for yourself such as an assisted living apartment. Don't assume that the method of care you want is also what your loved one wants.

Find a geriatric care manager

Care managers help families work out plans to meet an older loved one's caregiving needs. You can find one through the [Aging Life Care Association](#). Or you can call local agencies for referrals. Look in the phone book under "older adults" or "senior citizens." Be very careful to check references and credentials before hiring anyone to care for your family member. Use the National Center on Caregiving's Family Care Locator or the Administration on Aging to find help in your state.

Share responsibilities

Caregivers need to share duties with others. Set a schedule and say, for example, "On Sunday, you can take Mom to church; on Monday, you can drive her to the store," and so forth.

Try to keep a balance in your life

A burned-out caregiver isn't much help to anyone. Try to get enough sleep. Exhaustion is a common complaint among caregivers. Get regular exercise. Exercise helps ease stress. It also gives you a break from caregiving duties, and keeps depression at bay.

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