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What Is Respite Care?

Caregiving is not easy — not for the caregiver and not for the person receiving care. The ongoing demands of taking care of someone else can strain even the most resilient person. That's why it's critical for caregivers to ask for help and take a break when they need it.

Respite care provides short-term relief for primary caregivers, giving them time to rest, travel, or spend time with other family and friends. The care may last anywhere from a few hours to several weeks at a time. Respite care can take place at home, in a health care facility, or at an adult day care center.



Finding respite care

In some cases, family, friends, or volunteers can step in to provide respite care. There are also professionals who offer these services. To find respite care programs in your area, visit the [ARCH National Respite Locator Service](#). This tool enables you to search for local respite resources, including state-sponsored programs, adult day care centers, and services for veterans.

What to know about the costs of respite care

Respite care provided by a friend, relative, or volunteer may have no associated costs. Professional services charge by the hour or by the number of days or weeks that services are provided. For a person receiving [hospice care](#), Medicare will cover most of the cost for up to five consecutive days of respite care in a hospital or skilled nursing facility. Medicaid also may provide payment assistance.

Most private health insurance plans do not cover the costs of respite care. Some long-term care insurance plans may have coverage for this service. You must pay all costs not covered by insurance or government programs.

Asking others to step in so you can take a break

Accepting help from others isn't always easy. You may worry about being a burden, or you may feel uncomfortable admitting that you can't do it all yourself. But many caregivers later say they did too much on their own, and they wished they had asked for more support from family and friends. Understand that many people want to help, and it makes them feel good to contribute.

If you hesitate to ask others for assistance, here are some ideas:

- Ask for small things at first, if that makes it easier for you.
- If you aren't comfortable asking face-to-face, send a text or email with your request.
- Consider a person's skills and interests when thinking about how they could help.
- Download the [Worksheet: Coordinating Caregiving Responsibilities](#) (PDF, 161K), which provides a list of caregiving activities that you could divide up with others.
- If someone offers to help, practice saying, "Thanks for asking. Here's what you can do."

It's important to be honest about what you need and what you don't need. Not every offer is going to be helpful. And be prepared for some people to say "no" when you ask — try not to take it personally.

The Caregiver's Handbook

Explore this guide to getting started with caregiving, finding support, and taking care of yourself.

Download or order for free



If you're not the primary caregiver, how can you help that person?

A primary caregiver is the person who takes on most of the everyday responsibilities of caring for someone else. You may be able to lighten the primary caregiver's load by providing occasional respite care. But a primary caregiver — especially a spouse — may be hesitant to ask for a break. Here are some ways you could help them get the rest they need:

- Offer to stay with the older person for one afternoon a week, for example, so the primary caregiver can have some personal time.
- Arrange for regular respite care in the form of a volunteer, an in-home aide, or an adult day care program.
- If you live far away, travel to stay with the older person for a few days so the primary caregiver can take a vacation or just have some time off.

Ask the primary caregiver how you can be most helpful. And if they don't accept the first time, don't be afraid to ask again later.

You may also be interested in

- Learning about [services for older adults living at home](#)
- Exploring options for [paying for long-term care](#)
- Finding resources for [help with Alzheimer's caregiving](#)