

Regain hope and strength while caregiving

Caregivers are unpaid individuals, typically a spouse, child, neighbor, or friend, who assist with activities of daily living and medical tasks. These informal caregivers often fill in gaps between medical professionals or paid aides to meet the needs of incapacitated individuals.

The National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP indicate that approximately 43.5 million caregivers have provided unpaid care to an adult or child in the last 12 months. Roughly 15.7 million adult family caregivers in the United States care for someone who has Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia, states the Alzheimer's Association. Though both men and women serve as caregivers, females are the largest segment of unpaid caregivers, handling some of the most difficult tasks, such as bathing and dressing.

Many caregivers selflessly give back by providing assistance to a friend or family member, and view this type of service as a form of charitable giving. Others see it as simply being a good friend or family member. Although it can be rewarding to care for another person, caregiving also can be a stressful job that takes both a physical and emotional toll on caregivers. Caregiver stress is a very real side effect.

It is important for caregivers to recognize that offering medical care and support can leave them vulnerable to a wide range of consequences. These can include anxiety, depression, fatigue, and even increased exposure to illness.



It can be particularly sad to witness a loved one's health gradually deteriorate.

The Office on Women's Health says that anyone is susceptible to caregiver stress, but more women caregivers say they have stress and other health problems than male caregivers. Women who are caregivers of spouses are more likely to experience high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes than men. Depression is quite common among caregivers who spend a lot of time assisting those with various dementias because of the constant care such people require.

To remain as healthy as possible, caregivers should take steps to recognize symptoms of caregiver stress and avoid burnout. Here are some signs to keep in mind:

- Feelings of being overwhelmed
- Feeling alone or deserted by others
- Social withdrawal from friends or activities that used to make you feel good

- Exhaustion that makes it challenging to complete necessary tasks
 - Sleeplessness or sleeping more than normal
 - Lack of concentration that impacts daily tasks
 - Overreaction to minor nuisances
 - Cutting back on leisure activities
 - Neglecting things at home or other people who are well
 - An immune system that is run down, leading to constant illness
- The Alzheimer's Association says it

is important for caregivers to find time for themselves apart from caregiving tasks. Respite care or relying on others to fill in can free up time for a caregiver to relax and recharge. It is also important to prevent caregiving from becoming a person's whole existence. Investing time in other things that provide meaning and purpose can help caregivers find balance. Also, focusing on the things that can be controlled and small victories can make a difference.

Prepare for visiting elder guests

Homeowners may find themselves hosting senior guests several times throughout a typical year. These occasions can be wonderful opportunities for making memories, but homeowners may need to take certain precautions to ensure that guests are safe and comfortable. This may involve making some minor modifications around the home.

Mobility and comfort needs for seniors may differ those necessary to accommodate other guests. Meeting the needs of senior guests may involve any of the following.

- Make sure pathways leading to and from the home are level, cleared and easy to see.
- If possible, add a ramp over stairs that lead to the front door. Ensure handrails are sturdy.
- Remove clutter and excess furniture if a guest visiting will be using a walker or a manual/motorized wheelchair.
- Remove accent rugs from a home,

and be sure that any mats are secured with nonslip material.

- Increase lighting in entryways, staircases and hallways, especially areas leading to kitchens or bathrooms.
 - If guests will be staying overnight, arrange sleeping accommodations on the first floor and/or in a room closest to the bathroom.
 - Well-placed grab bars in the bathroom can be an asset. See if you can borrow a portable shower seat to make bathing or showering easier for overnight senior guests.
 - For long-term guests, consider replacing round doorknobs and other pulls with lever-action ones that are easy to grab.
 - Concessions may need to be made concerning interior temperature, noise levels and television viewing.
- Several easy modifications can be made to make senior guests feel comfortable when visiting others.

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