



Family Caregiving Tips: Am I a Caregiver?

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Caregiving describes any situation where one or more people provide care for someone else. The reason or reasons they need help vary widely, and each situation is different. This fact sheet will help answer the question - are you a caregiver? Also, a number of resources are given to help you get started (or continue) on your caregiving journey.

What does Caregiving Look Like?

Caregivers typically help their loved ones with four to five activities on a regular basis. Activities that are important to be able to live independently are referred to as instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs). Personal care activities are referred to as activities of daily living (ADLs).

According to a recent report, caregivers commonly help with the following tasks:

IADLS

- Transportation
- Shopping
- Housekeeping
- Preparing meals
- Managing money and medications
- Providing companionship

ADLS

- Dressing
- Bathing/Showering
- Feeding
- Using the toilet
- Transferring – getting in and out of a bed/chair
- Incontinence

Caregivers also help with tasks normally done by a medical professional - like cleaning and bandaging wounds; giving injections; or monitoring blood pressure, body temperature or heart rate. Caregivers frequently help coordinate their loved one's care. This can include scheduling appointments or in-home services, filing insurance or other types of paperwork, or other services needed. AARP has created several how-to videos for caregivers, including one on basic wound care: General Principles of Wound Care.

How Does Caregiving Start?

Caregiving starts when someone, a family member or friend, needs help with one or more tasks that support living on their own. While that person can be of any age, the largest number of people needing help are over age 50. They may have either a disability or chronic illness — or they may have a brain condition such as dementia or Alzheimer's disease.

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Helping someone often starts bit by bit – your loved one needs help with one or two tasks on a frequent basis. A common activity where help is first needed is when your family member or friend can no longer drive by themselves safely. Maybe help is needed with mowing the yard and raking leaves. As time goes on (either months or years), the number of tasks they need help with increases. The amount of time and effort spent helping your loved one increases, which can increase your level of stress.

Another common situation surrounds the death of the first spouse. Instead of two partners sharing responsibilities, now there is only one to take care of everything. The survivor may or may not want to or have the knowledge to take over what their spouse took care of.

There may be times when the need for help occurs suddenly, especially when an accident occurs with injury. A sudden heart attack or stroke are common causes for someone needing help. These events can be very stressful because everyone's lives can change overnight. The period of care may last a couple of weeks or months if your loved one recovers. It may last for years for a permanent condition.

Needing assistance with personal care activities (ADLs) generally occurs through time. More time and effort are required when you help with these activities.

So, You are a Caregiver! Now What?

A few helpful things to know for all caregivers is found below. The most crucial thing to keep in mind is that your family member or friend needs to be included in any discussion or decision making about their care. No one likes to be told what to do, so make sure you are asking your loved one what they would want or like.

1. It is never too early or too late to start planning! Whether you are just starting to provide help or have been helping for some time, having a care plan is very helpful. The focus of this plan is your loved one's needs and wishes for care. Creating a care plan takes a lot of the stress off the caregivers, since the guess work is gone. A great place to start is AARP's Prepare to Care booklet. OSU Extension fact sheet: T-2144 Family Caregiving Tips: Where do I Start? has helpful information as well. Your loved one's care plan should be reviewed frequently! A good rule of thumb is checking them every six months. People tend to change their minds frequently, so it is al-

ways good to check back in with your loved one to make sure the plan is still what they want. Also, make sure to review the care plan anytime your loved one's condition changes – they may need a different kind of care than the original plan.

2. Talk and talk often! Too often, people wait until a crisis to talk about what their loved one wants. This happens because people want to avoid touchy topics like when to stop driving. Avoiding tough topics can make matters worse down the road and leaves a lot of things to chance. When bringing up such subjects, it helps to look for an opening. Bring up an article you read or something you saw on the news. See how your loved one reacts and go from there. By starting slowly, you can make sure to not push your loved one past what they can handle at the time.

As you talk with your loved one, stay focused on what they are saying. Fully listen to what they say instead of thinking about your response. Before you respond, think about what they said, and their emotions behind it. Once you have taken a moment to think about it, then respond. Knowing they have been heard can ease their feelings.

3. Advocate for your loved one and YOURSELF! Making sure your family member or friend is getting the care they need can help them feel you are there for them. This may involve going to appointments with your loved one. With their permission, you may want to take notes, so you can refer back to them later. Being your loved one's advocate also may involve family meetings. Again, make sure you have your loved one's permission to speak on their behalf if needed. Everyone will feel better if family conflict can be avoided.

It is important to remember to advocate for yourself! Too often, caregivers put aside their own needs so they can take care of their loved one. You can offer better quality care to your family member or friend when you are healthy and calm. So, make sure to take time for yourself! The care plan should include all people who are part of the care team and what each person will help with (See OSU Extension fact sheet: T-2143 Family Caregiving Tips: Creating a Care Team). A care team that supports each other helps make life easier for everyone.

4. Find reliable information! The one thing caregivers always need is more information! With the internet, it is easier than ever to find what we need – recipes, local services, connecting with family and friends, etc. However, we have to be careful. Anyone can create something that looks official. So how do we find safe and reliable information?

When it comes to determining credible sources, follow these steps:

1. Start with known organizations – starting with a source you trust is a good way to narrow your search.
2. Check the date – you want current information. Depending on the topic, articles written within the last five years are better than older articles.

3. Check the author's credentials – make sure the author of the article has the expertise required to write about it.

For more information on evaluating sources, visit: [Evaluating Internet Content](#).

More Tips to Keep in Mind:

Below are more tips you may find helpful while providing care.

1. No one expects you to know everything! It is not uncommon to feel like you need to become an expert caregiver overnight. It is okay not to know the answer to something. Start small! Think about one to three things you need to get done now and learn about those. This way, you are not overwhelmed about needing to learn everything.
2. Be flexible! We are all creatures of habit and we like our routines. Caregiving will have its routine moments, but there are times it will change. Be flexible when that change happens!
3. Rely on the other members of the care team. If you feel isolated, remember there is a team of people who are able and eager to help your family member or friend!
4. Learn from your mistakes and keep moving forward! Your loved one appreciates everything you are doing, even if they don't express it.
5. Take time for yourself! Just like advocating for your loved one, advocate for yourself! No one knows your body better than you, so when feeling stressed or overwhelmed, take time for yourself. Take a walk, do an enjoyable activity – anything that helps you relax and recharge.

Additional Resources

General Wound Care: <https://videos.aarp.org/detail/video/5597247508001/family-caregiving-series--general-principles-of-wound-care-%E2%80%94aarp>

Prepare to Care Booklet: <https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/prepare-to-care-planning-guide/>

Family Caregiving Tips: <https://extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/family-caregiving-tips-where-do-i-start.html>

Creating a Care Team: <https://extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/family-caregiving-tips-creating-a-care-team.html>

Evaluating Internet Sources: <https://www.library.georgetown.edu/tutorials/research-guides/evaluating-internet-content>

References

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