

Who Cares for the Caregiver?



A USA Today/ABC News/Gallup Poll of baby boomers finds that 41 percent who have a living parent are providing care for them – either financially or through personal care – and 8 percent of boomers say their parents have already moved in with them. Chances are, any one of us will be a caregiver or a care receiver sooner rather than later. As we age and our spouses or parents become elderly or when illness suddenly strikes our family, we are often forced to take on the role of caregiver.

It's estimated that 34 million Americans serve as unpaid caregivers for other adults, usually elderly relatives, and that they spend an average of 21 hours a week helping out, according to a study recently released by AARP.

Traditionally, these caregivers are our close family members, friends, neighbors, and fellow church members who assist with tasks of normal every day living. They may drive us to doctor's appointments, help with grocery shopping, assist with managing finances, prepare meals, and provide housekeeping and home maintenance. More often than not, caregivers are required to assist with basic tasks such as getting a loved one out of bed, dressing them or bathing them. They even provide the love and emotional support we need in our daily lives. But

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Caregiver burnout and stress can result of the high demand of caring for the basic needs of a loved one 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year, year after year.

According to the National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC), in most families, women, daughters or daughters-in-law, aunts or nieces typically assume the burden of care. Among those women, more than 40 percent also work full-time jobs. Caregivers often struggle with conflicts of balancing family life, work, and caregiving responsibilities. Often, they overlook their own needs, foregoing personal time to relax, exercise, or socialize with family and friends. Unfortunately, they tend to focus on their loved ones and forget to take care of themselves.

It is important to recognize the signs of caregiver stress or burnout. Some of the common signs include withdrawal from family and friends, anxiety, loss of sleep, insomnia, and irritability due to the lack of taking care of themselves. You might also notice a change in appetite, loss of interest in activities and hobbies they once loved to do, or even increased smoking, drinking or use of drugs. Caring for an elderly parent can threaten the emotional health of caregivers and their families. Elder care can exhaust and

sometimes demoralize the caregiver that is on the frontline. You may find yourself arguing with your siblings, arguing with your spouse, arguing with your parents, and even arguing with yourself. As confusing and stressful as a long-term illness can be for an aging parent, it can be just as upsetting for the caregiver.

So what are some of important strategies we can do? First, is to be aware; if you are the caregiver, recognize your own needs. Second, develop a network of family, friends and neighbors who you can assist you. Remember, people who care about you and your loved one are just waiting to prepare a meal, sit with your loved one or go get groceries. Last but not least, ask for the help. Many people don't want to interfere in someone else's personal business. If you don't ask, they won't know you need help. This goes back to recognizing your needs as a caregiver, and accepting that others care too.

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