



Help for Caregivers

A caregiver is someone who helps a sick or disabled person. Caregiving may involve assisting with daily tasks, such as shopping, cooking, or dressing. As a caregiver, you may also help someone with medical care, such as keeping track of medicines, cleaning wounds, or talking to doctors.¹

Caregiving can be both rewarding and challenging.² It can take up a lot of your time. On average, caregivers spend 24 hours a week helping sick or disabled people. This is often in addition to other responsibilities, such as a job.¹ Caregiving can also be demanding. It may leave you feeling worn out or stressed.²



If you are caring for a family member, friend, or other person, please know you are not alone. About 1 in 4 Americans is a caregiver.¹

Get Help with Caregiving

Divide Up Caregiver Duties. Schedule a meeting with family and friends. If possible, include the person who needs your help and let his or her wishes guide you. Calmly discuss the type of help currently needed. You might also want to identify any additional help that may be needed in the future.³

Then, decide who will be responsible for various tasks. For instance, one friend or family member might pick up groceries or run errands. Another might volunteer to go to certain medical appointments. Even family and friends who live far away can help with tasks that can be done remotely, such as paying bills.^{2,3}





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Look into Community Services. The person you are caring for may be able to receive free or low-cost services. Examples include:

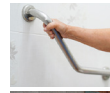


- **Meal delivery services** bring healthy meals right to the door. For instance, Meals on Wheels is available across the United States. The cost can range from free to regular price, depending on a person's income.⁴
- **Home delivery of medications** is sometimes offered free of charge by various pharmacies.⁵
- **Non-emergency medical transportation** is covered by some types of insurance. Local volunteer organizations may also provide free rides to the doctor and other places.^{6,7}



You can also pay service providers to help with chores, such as housekeeping or yard work. Home health aides can also be hired to help with personal care, such as bathing.⁷

Consider Changes to the Home. Home improvements that make daily tasks easier and safer can help the person you care for be more independent. Examples include^{7,8}:



- Grab bars in the tub or shower



- Ramps instead of stairs



- Lever handles that make opening doors easier



- Waterproof seats in the shower or bath



- Raised toilet seats

You also might be able to get help paying for expensive home improvements. Check with state and local agencies. Some Medicare Advantage insurance plans may help with the costs, too.⁸

Consider a Care Manager. Care managers (or case managers) are often licensed nurses or social workers. They can help you assess the needs of the person you are caring for. They can also help you coordinate care and find services in the community to meet those needs.³

Hospitals, home care agencies, and social service agencies may provide free or low-cost care management to the person you are helping. People who are eligible for certain government programs, such as Medicare or Medicaid, may also get free care management services. You can also hire a private care manager.⁹





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Reduce the Stress of Caregiving

Pay Attention to Your Own Health. It may be hard to meet your own needs when you are so busy. But it's important that you do. Eat right and exercise. Get enough sleep each night. See your doctor for regular check-ups.²



Join a Caregiver Support Group. A support group can give you a chance to share your feelings with others who are going through similar experiences. You may also benefit from the knowledge of other caregivers. To find a local or online group, ask hospital staff or your doctor. You might also look in the yellow pages. Or you could contact or visit websites of organizations that are devoted to the health problem(s) of the person you are caring for.²



Make Time for Yourself. Take time each day to do something you enjoy, such as gardening, reading, or watching a ballgame. Also, don't let your friendships fall by the wayside. If you can't leave the house, you might invite friends over for coffee or tea.²



Consider Respite Care. Respite gives you an occasional or regular break from caregiving. In addition to asking family, friends, and peers for help when you need a well-deserved break, explore services in your community. Respite care may be provided at adult day care centers or in nursing homes. Or you can arrange for in-home respite care provided by volunteers or professionals.²



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Health Tip:

Caregiving can take a toll on you. Over time, too much stress can be harmful to your health and well-being. Caregivers are more likely to get colds or the flu, as well as health problems like depression and diabetes. That's why taking care of yourself and getting support are so important.¹

If the strain of caregiving feels overwhelming, talk with your doctor or other health professional.



For More Information

To learn more about caregiving, you can seek out the websites of the following organizations:

- National Alliance for Caregiving
- Medicare Support for Caregivers
- Family Caregiver Alliance
- Caregiver Action Network
- Eldercare Locator
- National Respite Network





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References

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