

Caring for an Aging Loved One

Imagine taking on caregiving with all the resources and guidance necessary to feel fully supported and confident in your role.

THE AGING
POPULATION
IS GROWING,
and so is their need for
ongoing care.
Active caregiving may
initially feel more
challenging
than rewarding.

With hospital stays becoming shorter and medical costs rising, caring for an aging loved one is now commonplace in homes around the country. Over 65 million Americans are currently caring for a loved one. Of those caregivers, nearly two-thirds work outside the home as well.

CAREGIVER RESPONSIBILITIES

Caregivers help in many areas, including shopping, cooking, cleaning, paying bills, and administering medication. Also, they often help a loved one bathe, eat, dress, and use the restroom.

Beyond physical care, their emotional needs may be even greater. Loss of their home, health, and possibly their mind can be physically, emotionally, and mentally draining to both the patient and caregiver.

There might be communication needs, with you functioning as the spokesperson.

INVOLVING YOUR AGING LOVED ONES

Respecting your loved one and keeping them involved in the caregiving process is both honoring and dignifying. Long-term medical, financial, and housing decisions are critical, and your aging loved one should be included in all those decisions.

Medical guidance from doctors, home health aides, and physical and/or occupational therapists will help the transition. They can answer questions regarding how diseases might progress, how to make your caregiving experience easier, and how to prevent injury to yourself and loved one. As technology continues to develop, it's possible an assistive device could help them assume more daily responsibility and enjoy greater mobility in life.

ACTION STEPS

Communication in any family is tricky at times. Maneuvering emotionally charged topics, like caregiving, can be especially difficult. These tips can prove helpful.

- ✓ **Be present** - Give yourself plenty of time for conversations. Remove or limit distractions, such as phones and electronic devices. If your loved one is battling dementia, be patient as any conversation may be challenging.
- ✓ **Respect their voice** - Clearly convey your point of view without

manipulating or coercing agreement. They should be actively involved in the process as much as possible.

- ✓ **Listen** - Respect and consider your loved one's thoughts, even if you disagree.
- ✓ **Plan conversations** - An honest and honorable conversation is the goal, and sometimes that requires a plan. Outline your main points, so as not to do all the talking. Avoid blaming anyone or attempting to "win" an argument.

KEEP IN MIND

Transition takes time. Caring for an aging loved one is essentially a role reversal, as the adult child becomes the "parent." While certainly there will be struggles and sacrifices along the way, the additional time with your loved one can be a priceless gift.

What steps will you take today to create the best plan for your aging loved one?