

What is Caregiving?

Caregiving is providing care for the physical and emotional needs of a family member or a friend at home.

Caregiving may involve:

assisting with meals, personal care and transportation
helping with medical procedures and therapy
devoting just a few hours weekly or many hours each day



What should I learn to become a Caregiver?

Physically – The proper lifting and transferring techniques and equipment can make some of your tasks easier.

Mentally – Giving care demands a lot of thought. Learning to plan ahead and use your time is very important and vital to your well-being.

Emotionally – Caregivers can easily feel isolated and frustrated. Understanding the challenges of caregiving is the first step in meeting them.

The Many Roles of the Caregiver

Being part of the overall Health Care Team

Caregivers are part of this team that includes:

physicians and nurses
physical, speech and occupational therapists
home health aides
social workers
hospice volunteers
other health professionals



To give and get the best care possible depends on clear and respectful communication among the Health Care Team.

Providing Emotional Support can greatly affect the physical health of your loved one. One of the greatest gifts a caregiver can provide is the human contact and loving support.

Help make Decisions – You may assist your loved one and health-care team with decisions on care and other issues.

Finding the right help – You may help with or be fully responsible for finding the right services for your loved ones care.

Encouraging your loved one – Allowing them to do as much as possible for themselves helps them feel valuable and in control.

Taking care of you – Caregiving can be an exhausting job. It's very important for caregivers to maintain their own mental and physical health.

Making Home Modifications

General Precautions

Fire safety-Install smoke alarms and check fire extinguishers. Make escape plans that the patient can manage. Hold fire drills to make sure everyone is aware of what their own responsibilities are.

Emergencies-Keep numbers by the phone.

Mobility-If needed, install ramps over stairs and check door widths to allow for a wheelchair. Remove throw rugs that slip. Keep walkways open and move furniture that might tip easily if used for support.



Considerations for the Bathroom:

- a raised toilet seat
- grab bars near the toilet and tub
- nonskid mats to prevent falls in the tub or shower and elsewhere
- lower the water temperature on the hot water heater to prevent burns
- other items to consider include a bath seat and hand held shower head

Considerations for the Bedroom:

- a intercom communication system
- hospital or special bed
- an over-bed table for eating, reading, etc.
- a night light in the room and in the hallway

Other Areas to consider:

- handrails in hallways
- special handles for cups, pots, silverware, brushes, etc.
- levers for doors instead of knobs
- walkers, wheelchairs, canes, reaching devices, etc.

Good Mental Health for Everyone

No matter his or her physical condition, every patient needs:

Privacy-Allow you're loved one time alone and a spot for private visits and conversations.

Self Respect-Treat your loved one as an important and capable human being.

Give as much responsibility as possible-Even small and simple tasks can help a person feel needed and competent.

Adjusting to new situations-For many, accepting the need to learn new physical skills or adapt old ones is a process that takes time and energy.

Caregiver Emotions-Caregiving can mean a major change in your life.

Accept your new Caregiving role-Keep a positive attitude. Providing care can be a great gift to a person in need.

Get help from others-Try and get a group of others to help in giving care, caregivers can relieve one another from duties from time to time.

Talk with Friends-Sharing thoughts and feelings are an important way to stay in touch with others and avoid caregiver burnout and feeling isolated.

Seeking Professional Help-Caregiving is bound to cause stress. If the stress seems overwhelming, don't hesitate to seek help.

Long Distance Caregiving

Not every caregiver has the ability to live near their loved one. Here are some tips to help ease those feelings of despair:

Observing your loved one during visits

Are they:

- eating properly?
- taking medications properly?
- able to get out and about to do their errands?
- is the house messy and unorganized?
- increased confusion?



These answers will help you to determine what if any types of care is needed and how to arrange them.

Hiring a Care Manager

Care managers act as a substitute family member to your loved one and can arrange for services such as:

- visiting nurses
- care providers
- home delivered meals

Always ask about services provided and costs involved.

Creating a support system of others

People living near your loved one may be willing to help. Consider the following:

- friends
- relatives
- church or community service groups

Contact the local Area Agency on Aging for information on other local resources