



The AGS Foundation for Health in Aging's

Tips For Avoiding Caregiver Burnout

As many as 44 million Americans care for older parents, in-laws, grandparents and other older loved ones.

Some older adults need only a little assistance from family caregivers; for example, help with shoveling snow, or rides to and from the grocery store. Others need a lot of help with daily activities like eating, bathing, dressing, taking medications and managing money. Over time, an older adult often needs increasing help from caregivers.

While caring for an older family member can be one of the most rewarding experiences of a lifetime, it can also be stressful and frustrating. This is especially likely if the older adult has dementia or needs around-the-clock care. Most family caregivers are spouses or children. They may have age-related health problems of their own; or they may have small children to care for, or work outside the home, or all of these. Sometimes, providing care for an older relative can be extremely distressing and lead to “caregiver burnout.”

To avoid caregiver burnout, it's important to get help *before* caregiving becomes overwhelming. If you're caring for an older loved one, the American Geriatrics Society's Foundation for Health in Aging suggests that you:

Get information Learn as much as you can about your older loved one's health problems and needs and how these are likely to change over time. This will help you plan and prepare for these changes. Learning about options for care that your loved one may need in the future – such as help from a home aide, or assisted living or nursing home care – can also help you prepare for and feel more secure about your loved one's future.

The FHA's award-winning, easy-to-read guide, *Eldercare at Home*, includes a wealth of information on caring for an aging loved one. You can find a free, printable version of *Eldercare at Home* on the Internet, at http://www.healthinaging.org/public_education/eldercare/

Help your loved one help himself or herself. Doing something as simple as putting a special, no-slip seat in the shower or bath; installing “grab bars” in the bathroom and near your loved one's bed; moving kitchen supplies to lower shelves; or getting easy-grip can openers and other utensils can make it possible for an older relative to keep doing certain things independently.

Ask trustworthy family, friends and neighbors for assistance. Perhaps a neighbor can take your mother to the grocery store once a week, or your sister could help make meals for mom on weekends. Explain

what needs to be done, but try not to criticize if others don't care for your loved one in exactly the way you would. The important thing is that his or her needs are met.

Take care of yourself, too Eating well, exercising, and taking time to relax and enjoy yourself are key to avoiding burnout. If you taking care of yourself you'll be able to take better care of your aging family member.

Don't take it personally If your older relative has dementia or other mental or emotional problems, he or she may act out or say hurtful things. Remind yourself that this behavior is a result of his or her illness. Try not to take it to heart.

Talk about it Talking about your experiences and feelings can make care giving less stressful. Joining a caregiver support group in your area will give you a chance to share your thoughts, feelings and information with others in similar circumstances.

Contact professionals and organizations that assist caregivers A wide array of programs, agencies, organizations, and individuals in your community can help you manage the challenges of caring for an older relative. This assistance may be free, or available at low cost.

The following agencies and people can help you find the help you need:

- **Your local Area Agency on Aging** is your best resource. Find the phone number in the white pages of your telephone book, under “Area Agency on Aging,” “Senior Center” or “Senior Services”. If you can’t find the number in those places, call your state Office on Aging, which is listed in the blue pages of your phone book, in the “State Services” section. The office can give you the phone number for your local Area Agency on Aging.
- **Other community agencies** such as your local United Way and religious organizations such as Catholic Charities or your local Councils of Churches can also help you find help.
- **Social workers** at hospitals or home health agencies, and specially trained social workers called “geriatric care managers” can help, too. (Note: Insurance usually doesn’t cover the cost of geriatric care manager assistance.)
- **Financial** – assistance and advice on paying for the services your loved one needs; including assistance completing necessary paper work
- **Transportation** – to take your loved one shopping or to and from medical appointments, for example
- **Meals** – including help preparing meals in your loved one’s home and meals delivered to his or her home
- **Respite care services** – which send trained helpers to your loved one’s home so you can take a break
- **Reliable “home helpers”** – people who can visit your loved one for an hour or two at a time to help with bathing, light housekeeping, cooking, and errands
- **Adult day care** – centers where your older loved one can go for several hours during the day for care supervised by health care staff. This care usually includes social programs, recreation and meals. Special adult day care programs are available for people with dementia, depression and social problems.
- **Home nursing services** – including visits from Registered Nurses, private duty nurses, nurse aides and hospice staff

Among other things, an Area Agency on Aging case-worker can visit you and your loved one and give you information about different sources of the help you need, how much this help might cost, and how you can get financial assistance.

Among other things, these groups and individuals can help you locate the following kinds of help:



Foundation for Health in Aging

Established by the American Geriatrics Society

350 Fifth Avenue
Suite 801
New York, NY 10118
212-755-6810
www.healthinaging.org

The Foundation for Health in Aging builds a bridge between the research and practice of geriatrics health care professionals and the public. The Foundation advocates on behalf of older adults and their special needs through public education, clinical research, and public policy.

The American Geriatrics Society is dedicated to improving the health and well-being of older adults. With a membership of over 6,000 health care professionals, the AGS has a long history of improving the health care of older adults.