

# Work, Family & Your Caregiving Responsibilities

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## Striking a Healthy Balance

While caring for a loved one can offer a unique sense of fulfillment, it also comes with many responsibilities and may leave you feeling overwhelmed. Trying to balance caregiving duties with employment obligations is stressful. There are only 24 hours in a day – and with so much to do, it's common to neglect yourself in order to get everything done.

It's important to find ways to manage the stress and time constraints involved with caregiving. Don't be afraid to ask for and, more importantly, accept help from friends and family. Caregivers who feel supported not only have lower stress levels, but they also experience fewer feelings of isolation. Successfully navigating the negative aspects of caregiving will hopefully allow you to embrace the more rewarding aspects.

## The Facts on Stress and Caregiving

Family caregivers are at an increased risk for a number of health and wellness issues, ranging from heart disease to depression. Caregiver stress can also compromise your immune system and/or exacerbate pre-existing chronic health problems. Consider this eye-opening statistic: Caregivers are five times more likely to get sick than non-caregivers. They even have a higher risk of premature mortality!

## Tangible Ways to Put Yourself – and Your Health – First

### Seek Support

While asking for help can be difficult, it's a significant part of overcoming feelings of being overwhelmed. Take advantage of community resources. If you don't have a friend or family member to talk to, look into support groups at your local hospital, community or senior centers. Online forums can also be a valuable outlet.



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### **Go Guilt-Free**

While caregiving abilities are not something that can be accurately measured, many still feel like they're failing because they hold themselves to unattainable standards. Your best is the best you can do. Acknowledging your own efforts and setting clear boundaries can help you avoid feelings of guilt.

### **Take Time Out**

Everyone needs some "me time" now and then, but no one is going to schedule it for you. It's important to set aside regular time each week to do something that you enjoy. But remember, while it's perfectly fine to want time alone, social interactions are critical in keeping depression at bay – so be sure to stay in touch with friends and family as well.

### **The Doctor Is In**

Many caregivers are so busy keeping up with the appointments of their family members they neglect their own. This can have long-term repercussions for your health. Make sure to schedule your own regular check-ups, and let your doctor know if you are experiencing feelings of isolation or depression.

## **Understanding the Caregiver's Role**

## Love, Respect & Companionship

With the necessary health effect disclaimers out of the way, it's time to examine how to get the most out of your caregiving experience. Your role may seem straightforward on paper. There are "typical" responsibilities such as preparing meals, assisting with physical needs and a broad range of day-to-day tasks. However, caregiving is also accompanied by many unwritten and unquantifiable tasks, including providing comfort and companionship, demonstrating patience and forgiving others.

## Embracing the Gift of Caregiving

If you think asking for help is hard, imagine how difficult it is for your loved one. Imagine the feeling of helplessness when suddenly having to rely on others for tasks you were once able to do for yourself. Showing love and compassion through understanding can improve the lives of the people for whom you care and make the act of caregiving more meaningful for you as well.

>Keep in mind that if an individual in your care is being difficult or obstinate, it's not necessarily deliberate. Rather, they may be feeling lonely, scared or depressed. Even small acts of love can help struggling seniors feel valued, respected, honored and cared for, which, in turn, can reverse these behaviors.

Small things can make a big difference. Striving to be positive, smiling, listening, laughing, watching television together, praying together, and encouraging seniors to share stories, memories and wisdom are a few simple things you can do to feel more connected with aging loved ones.

## Qualities of Successful and Happy Caregivers

Being a caregiver is one of life's most difficult jobs. And while some are called to the path, others are surprised to end up in the role. Regardless of how you come to be the one responsible for the care of another, these six qualities will serve you well in terms of navigating the challenges and finding personal and professional fulfillment:

- The Ability to Just "Be"
- Flexibility
- Being Detail-Oriented
- Being Proactive
- Patience

- Empathy

## Benefits of In-Home Care

### Lightening the Load

Your loved one may insist on staying in their home, but this can prove challenging – both for seniors and the family members who care for them. Fortunately, there are some ways to support quality of life while honoring your aging loved one's desire for ongoing independence. Topping the list? Hiring in-home care. Here's a closer look at four ways this increasingly popular form of senior care can be a vital part of helping to meet the needs of patients and caregivers alike.

### Ease Demand on Caregivers

The majority of caregivers spend upwards of 18 hours a week on caregiving-related tasks, according to an AARP report, "Valuing the Invaluable: 2015 Update."

But as previously discussed, most caregivers are also juggling other responsibilities -- from the professional to the personal. Unfortunately, keeping up with these physical and emotional demands can trigger caregiver burnout. The support provided by in-home care can be a vital safety net and defense against burnout.

### Bridge Geographical Divides

According to the AARP, 40 percent of people over the age of 50 have children living more than five hours' driving distance from them. While this unprecedented geographical sprawl is leading to new obstacles when it comes to caring for aging loved ones, in-home care can be a mitigating factor. Family members can still stay involved in caring for aging loved ones while simultaneously benefiting from the peace of mind of knowing someone is there when they can't be.

### Free Up Caregiver Schedules

Just because many caregivers devote their lives to aging loved ones doesn't mean they don't have commitments of their own. Without the right support mechanisms in place, everything from self-care to "me time" can end up being pushed aside for the more immediate mandates of caregiving. While, in some cases, family members and friends can provide assistance, in other cases their schedules do not allow them to be able to help when needed. In-home caregivers can fill this void and also provide much-needed restorative respite care.

## Evolve with Changing Needs

Neither advancing age nor illness is static. As the needs of care recipients change, so do the demands on caregivers. In-home caregivers are flexible in terms of the types of services they provide, meaning that family caregivers aren't overwhelmed by a continually growing list of responsibilities. In-home caregivers provide a range of critical services to aging loved ones and the people who care for them. Resulting in a better ability to meet the changing needs of aging loved ones without compounding family caregiver stress.