

Healthy Aging—Caring for Our Parents and Ourselves

We've all discovered that "adulting" is difficult. Managing work, parenting, relationships, finances, and all those daily life frustrations is a lot. It seems the older we get, the more challenging finding a balance can be. Through many life stages, we may have become accustomed to viewing our parents as healthy, strong, and everlasting. Maybe they've been a source of support when things get hectic. But as our lives move full speed ahead, and as they age, the dynamic will inevitably shift. We may notice subtle changes at first—their hearing weakens, their movement slows, their memories dim. For adult children, the realization that our parents need support can create feelings of anxiety, fear, and frustration.



Knowing When to Step in As Adult Children

There are a variety of reasons adult children and other family members step in with caregiving support. Some of these reasons include:

- A gradual decline in health
- A sudden health emergency
- New health issues
- A new diagnosis or treatment plan

The realization that a parent needs help may hit each family at various stages and for different reasons. With that in mind, it is important to be as involved in or familiar with your parent's day-to-day routine as possible so that changes in their behaviors or habits can be noted. Recognizing a shift in your parent's patterns is an important part of assessing a situation, and catching things earlier, which helps when looking for viable solutions. A pattern change could look like skipping dates with friends, missing a bill payment or confusion after a doctor's appointment.

What To Do When a Parent Needs Help? Top 8 Suggestions to Build a Plan

If you notice changes that seem worrisome, it might be difficult to know exactly what you can do to ensure they are safe and healthy. Try focusing on the following suggestions to help build a practical, realistic plan.

1. Assessment of Needs

Start with basic and concrete concerns by evaluating their current situation. This helps us to understand how much help our parent needs with everyday life. To start, consider Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs). IADLs are activities that are important facets of independent functioning. These activities may include things like:

- Cooking and preparing meals daily
- Routinely cleaning or maintaining their home
- Running errands (shopping, getting mail, etc.)
- Paying bills/budgeting finances
- Communicating with others via telephone or other forms of technology
- Keeping up with taking prescription medications

In assessing these items, are you finding deficiencies? If not, consider this a good baseline. Keep notes on what you can see, so you can reference them later. Assess regularly. How much support are they receiving in each category and how much help do they realistically need to stay safe and healthy? If you find that your parent is struggling with one or more of these areas, consider whether there might be a simple fix. For example, assisting your parent with organizing their prescriptions for each day, and using a pill organizer can be a helpful way to ensure that they are taking their medication on time and properly. If you find several areas of needed support that do not have a simple solution, there are local and national [resources](#) that are available, depending on your circumstances. Resources can include things like transportation assistance, grocery, or meal delivery, in home assistance, adult day care, or residential support.

A note on memory loss- A certain amount of memory loss can be a normal part of the aging process; however, cognitive decline could be a warning sign of Alzheimer's, or other forms of age-related dementia. Look out for [common signs](#), and seek medical assistance for help, and next steps.

2. Home Safety Basics

Safety hazards in the house add up over time, making it easier for older adults to trip, fall, or hurt themselves. Baring other health concerns, preventing falls or other accidents can go a long way to keeping your parent independent.

Simple fixes include:

- Making sure all floors and walkways are clear of clutter, cords, and rugs

- Adding grab bars in the bathroom and stair railings throughout
- Updating lights so all rooms are bright, and switches are easily accessible
- Ensuring all appliances work well and are within easy reach
- Minimizing the need to use stepstools or bend down low

For more suggestions, consult the [room-by-room home safety modification guide](#).

3. Consider Your Own Needs

Everyone is in a different place in their lives. Before you assume that you can take care of all your parent's needs by yourself, stop, and think about your own situation and abilities.

- Does your health allow you to physically care for someone?
- Do you live close enough to visit as often as needed?
- Would you want to live with them, either in their house or yours?
- Do you have the kind of relationship that allows you to spend a lot of time together without creating a lot of negative feelings on either side?
- Do you have the personality to provide the type of care they need?
- Are you willing to learn how to provide that care?
- Does your current situation allow you the space, time, and flexibility to do any or all the above?

We want our parents to be safe and healthy. And it is not selfish or heartless if you're not the best person to personally provide that care. By looking out for their health and safety and arranging the help they will need, you're still being a supportive and caring child. It is best to make an honest assessment early in the process, so you don't get yourself into a situation that's not sustainable. If you take on too much and burn out physically or emotionally, you won't be able to help your parent or yourself.

4. Include Your Parent in the Process

The topic of helping to care for our parents is not just difficult for us. It's often tough for them, as their role has always been to be the caregiver. For this reason, it's important to involve your parent as much as possible with planning and decision making. This helps them see you more as a partner rather than someone who's swooping in to make changes and helps foster a sense of control over their own circumstances. Of course, these conversations can be difficult, and you may be met with resistance. Nobody wants to feel as if their independence is slipping away. If they're not in immediate danger, try not to force changes too quickly. You might want to start with less intrusive approaches and increase the level of help as you go, helping to get them used to accepting support by focusing on 1 or 2 critical needs.

5. Get to Know the Financial Landscape

No matter what, caring for an older adult will cost money. Of course, the amount will depend on individual circumstances, so it's a good strategy to understand and try to estimate both current and potential future costs to be as prepared as possible. If your parent is in good health, and cognitively sound, they may not need as much support. However, if you are noticing mobility concerns, or cognitive decline, this may require more in-depth, and costly assistance. It's important to have a discussion with your parent about their finances, or if there are any plans in place to account for changes in circumstances, such as long-term care insurance. These conversations are often uncomfortable, but it is important to get an understanding of their financial position to understand whether assistance may be necessary, such as government programs, Medicaid or other [resources](#). You may want to consult an elder law attorney or financial planner to help you with things like qualifying for Medicaid or estate planning. Elder law attorneys can also help with other important decisions, such as power of attorney, and advance directives. These decisions also help your parent to feel more in control of their own care. If you need help bringing up the topic, [five wishes](#) can be a great resource.

6. Connection and Communication

Isolation and loneliness have a serious negative effect on overall health for anyone. Seniors are at increased risk for these health hazards, so it is vital that we keep them feeling connected to family and friends as much as possible. Check-in often. Make time for meaningful conversations and visits when you can talk about more than just ways to keep them safe. Make sure their phone is easy to use and easily accessible. For some, keeping a simple mobile phone with pre-programmed numbers in their pocket is reassuring and easier to get to. If needed, think about options to help your parent foster increased communication and community connections, such as local programming for seniors, or adult day care.

7. Seek Expert Assistance

Even when we have the best intentions, caring for a parent can feel overwhelming. Try talking to experts who can make things more manageable.

- **Geriatric care managers** – Act as consultants to guide you and/or help manage all aspects of caring for your parent. Their experience could save you time, money, and headaches down the road.
- **In-home caregiving help** – Whether you hire privately or go through a home care agency, hired caregivers take care of seniors in their home.
- **Assisted living communities** – If your parent is not able to live on their own or needs 24/7 care, assisted living and other senior housing options might be the right choice.
- **Geriatricians (geriatric doctors)** – Specialize in caring for seniors and have more experience treating people with multiple chronic health conditions, dementia, and other conditions that primarily affect older adults.

- **Area Agency on Aging** – County-level government office that serves local seniors. It's a great starting point because they connect you with helpful [local resources and government programs](#).

8. Remember to Care for Yourself

Caretaking, no matter what the circumstances can be difficult to adapt to as it highlights a change in your parent's life as well as a new chapter in your relationship. Many are providing care and support for relatives and friends without even realizing it or identifying themselves as a caregiver. Learning how to cope as a caretaker is vital as it can prevent 'caregiver burnout.' When we feel burned out, we enter a state of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion, often due to the amount of stress involved in the role of caregiving. Nearly 50% of people report struggling to find a balance between their personal lives and their caretaking responsibilities, and 40% report experiencing depression. Learning and practicing self-care helps with the physical and emotional toll. Reach out for support and involve someone else in your parent's health care when you begin to feel overwhelmed.

National Resources

[Government Benefits](#): Programs include healthcare coverage, disability coverage, military veteran assistance, and more.

[Area Agency on Aging](#): Find various senior programs, services, and funding in your local area.

[Benefits Checkup](#): Discover any benefits or programs your parent may be eligible for, nationwide and close to home.

You are not alone, and there is support and resources available, including Ulliance for individual or family counseling to help you process your feelings and manage your emotions. Ulliance can also provide you with referrals to resources for eldercare assistance in your area.

**For more information, tools, resources, or app information, call your
Life Advisor Employee Assistance Program!**



**Ulliance provides no cost, confidential, short term counseling
for you & your family.**

Call us- we're here to help **800.448.8326**