



# The Ultimate Guide to Supporting Aging Loved Ones

*Bonus – 4 Hidden Costs of Caregiving + How to care  
for the caregiver*

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# Supporting aging loved ones

*Staying healthy physically, mentally, and emotionally is what defines well-being and happiness for most people at any age. Naturally, as we age, we wish to maintain our health and longevity and reduce the risk of physical and mental disability. As far as healthy aging at home, the key is to maintain balanced well-being, physically, mentally and emotionally. One thing to remember is that it's never too late to make a healthy change and even a little can go a long way. Indeed, one positive change can give us the motivation to make more positive choices as we begin to feel better!*

## Some key challenges seniors face:

- Loneliness
- Poor physical health
- Diminished memory recall and cognitive functioning
- Lack of sense of purpose
- Lower self-esteem
- Healthy diet

## Here are tips to healthy aging:

### Tip 1: Learn to cope with change

*As you age, there will be periods of both joy and stress. It's important to build your resilience and find healthy ways to cope with challenges. This ability will help you make the most of the good times and keep your perspective when times are tough*

- **Focus on the things you're grateful for.** The longer you live, the more you lose. But as you lose people and things, life becomes even more precious. When you stop taking things for granted, you appreciate and enjoy what you have even more
- **Acknowledge and express your feelings.** You may have a hard time showing emotions, perhaps feeling that such a display is inappropriate and weak. But burying your feelings can lead to anger, resentment, and depression. Don't deny what you're going through. Find healthy ways to process your feelings, perhaps by talking with a close friend or writing in a journal.



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- **Look for the silver lining.** As the saying goes, "What doesn't kill us makes us stronger." When facing major challenges, try to look at them as opportunities for personal growth. If your own poor choices contributed to a stressful situation, reflect on them and learn from your mistakes
- **Take daily action to deal with life's challenges.** When a challenge seems too big to handle, sweeping it under the carpet often appears the easiest option. But ignoring the problem doesn't make it go away; it allows both the problem and your anxiety to build. Instead, take things one small step at a time. Even a small step can go a long way to boosting your confidence and reminding you that you are not powerless.

## Tip 2: Find meaning and joy

*A key ingredient in the recipe for healthy aging is the continuing ability to find meaning and joy in life. As you age, your life will change and you will gradually lose things that previously occupied your time and gave your life purpose. For example, your job may change, you may eventually retire from your career, your children may leave home, or other friends and family may move far away. But this is not a time to stop moving forward. Later life can be a time of exciting new adventures if you let it.*

- **Pick up a long-neglected hobby** or try a new hobby. Taking a class or joining a club or sports team is a great way to pursue a hobby and expand your social network at the same time.
- **Learn something new**, such as an instrument, a foreign language, a new game, or a new sport. Learning new activities not only adds meaning and joy to life, but can also help to maintain your brain health and prevent mental decline.
- **Get involved in your community.** Try attending a local event or volunteering for a cause that's important to you. The meaning and purpose you find in helping others will enrich and expand your life. Community work can also be a great way of utilizing and passing on the skills you honed in your career-without the commitment or stress of regular employment.



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## Tip 3: Stay Connected

*One of the greatest challenges of aging is maintaining your support network. Staying connected isn't always easy as you grow older—even for those who have always had an active social life. Career changes, retirement, illness, and moves out of the local area can take away close friends and family members. And the older you get, the more people you inevitably lose. In later life, getting around may become difficult for either you or members of your social network.*

- **Connect regularly with friends and family.** Spend time with people you enjoy and who make you feel upbeat. It may be a neighbor who you like to exercise with, a lunch date with an old friend, shopping with your children, or playing with your grandkids. Even if you are not close by, call or email frequently to keep relationships fresh.
- **Make an effort to make new friends.** As you lose people in your circle, it is vital to make new connections so your social life doesn't decline. Make it a point to befriend people who are younger than you. Younger friends can reenergize you and help you see life from a fresh perspective.
- **Spend time with at least one person every day.** Whatever your living or work situation, you shouldn't be alone day after day. Phone or email contact is not a replacement for spending time with other people. Regular face-to-face contact helps you ward off depression and stay positive.
- **Volunteer.** Giving back to the community is a wonderful way to strengthen social bonds and meet others interested in similar activities or who share similar values. Even if your mobility becomes limited, you can get involved by volunteering on the phone.
- **Find support groups in times of change.** If you or a loved one is coping with a serious illness or recent loss, it can be very helpful to participate in a support group with others undergoing the same challenges.



*Seniors who reported feelings of loneliness were at a **45%** greater risk of mortality. Isolated seniors were also shown to have a **59%** greater risk of physical and mental decline compared to their peers that were more socially active.*

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## Tip 4: Get active and boost vitality

*Don't fall for the myth that growing older automatically means you're not going to feel good anymore. It is true that aging involves physical changes, but it doesn't have to mean discomfort and disability. While not all illness or pain is avoidable, many of the physical challenges associated with aging can be overcome or drastically mitigated by exercising, eating right, and taking care of yourself.*

- **Exercise.** A recent Swedish study found that exercise is the number one contributor to longevity, adding extra years to your life—even if you don't start exercising until your senior years. But it's not just about adding years to your life, it's about adding life to your years. Exercise helps you maintain your strength and agility, increases vitality, improves sleep, gives your mental health a boost, and can even help diminish chronic pain. Exercise can also have a profound effect on the brain, helping prevent memory loss, cognitive decline, and dementia.

- **Eat well.** As you age, your relationship to food may change along with your body. A decreased metabolism, changes in taste and smell, and slower digestion may affect your appetite, the foods you can eat, and how your body processes food. But now, more than ever, healthy eating is important to maintain your energy and health. Avoiding sugary foods and refined carbs and loading up on high-fiber fruits, vegetables, and whole grains instead will help you feel more energetic, while eating with others is a great way to stay in touch with friends.

- **Get plenty of sleep.** Many adults complain of sleep problems as they age, including insomnia, daytime sleepiness, and frequent waking during the night. But getting older doesn't automatically bring sleep problems. Developing healthy sleep habits as you age can help you ensure you get enough quality sleep each night. Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark, and cool, avoid artificial light from screens for at least one hour before bed, and increase your activity levels during the day. A soothing bedtime ritual, like taking a bath or playing music can help you wind down and get a good night's sleep.



*More than **65 million people**, 29% of the U.S. population, provide care for a chronically ill, disabled, or aged family member or friend during any given year and spend an average of 20 hours per week providing care for their loved one.*

# Supporting aging loved ones

## Tip 5: Keep your mind sharp

*There are many good reasons for keeping your brain as active as your body. Exercising, keeping your brain active, and maintaining creativity can actually help to prevent cognitive decline and memory problems. The more active and social you are and the more you use and sharpen your brain, the more benefits you will get. This is especially true if your career no longer challenges you or if you've retired from work altogether.*

- **Try variations on what you know.** For some people, it might be games or sports. Other people may enjoy puzzles or trying out new cooking recipes. Find something that you enjoy and challenge your brain by trying new variations or increasing how well you do an activity. If you like crosswords, move to a more challenging crossword series or try your hand at a new word game. If you like to cook, try a completely different type of food, or if you're a golfer, aim to lower your handicap.
- **Work something new in each day.** You don't have to work elaborate crosswords or puzzles to keep your memory sharp. Try to work in something new each day, whether it is taking a different route to work or the grocery store or brushing your teeth with a different hand.
- **Take on a completely new subject.** Taking on a new subject is a great way to continue to learn. Have you always wanted to learn a different language? Learn new computer skills? Learn to play the piano? There are many inexpensive classes at community centers or community colleges that allow you to tackle new subjects.



## Did You Know?

*Only 11% of seniors go less than  
**A MONTH**  
without contact with a loved one*

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# 3 myths about healthy aging

1

## **Myth**

*Aging means declining health and/or disability*



## **Fact:**

There are some diseases that become more common as we age. However, getting older does not automatically mean poor health or that you will be confined to a walker or wheelchair. Plenty of older adults enjoy vigorous health, often better than many younger people. Preventive measures like healthy eating, exercising, and managing stress can help reduce the risk of chronic disease or injuries later in life..

2

## **Myth**

*Memory loss is an inevitable part of aging.*



## **Fact:**

As you age, you may eventually notice you don't remember things as easily as in the past, or memories may start to take a little longer to retrieve. However, significant memory loss is not an inevitable result of aging. Brain training and learning new skills can be done at any age and there are many things you can do to keep your memory sharp. The sooner you start, the sooner you'll reap the benefits.

3

## **Myth**

*You can't teach an old dog new tricks.*



## **Fact:**

One of the more damaging myths of aging is that after a certain age, you just won't be able to try anything new or contribute to things anymore. The opposite is true. Middle aged and older adults are just as capable of learning new things and thriving in new environments, plus they have the wisdom that comes with life experience. If you believe in and have confidence in yourself, you are setting up a positive environment for change no matter what your age.



# 4 Hidden Costs of Caregiving

*Most employers underestimate the impact that caregiving has on its workers, with less than one-fourth believing that the demands of caring for a loved one affect job performance, while more than 80 percent of employees say it has affected their productivity, according to "The Caring Company," a 2019 report from Harvard Business School.*

*Part of the problem is that few companies track the demographic data associated with caregiving, resulting in a variety of hidden costs. Here are a few identified in the study:*

- 1 Employee Turnover.** The report revealed that nearly 32 percent of all employees had voluntarily left a job during their career due to caregiving responsibilities.
- 2 Replacing highly experienced employees.** Those at the highest levels of an organization, who are the hardest to replace were most likely to quit because of caregiving demands.
- 3 Presenteeism.** Employees who are worried and distracted can't do their best work. This is especially true for high-achieving employees between the ages of 25 and 35. A vast majority—88 percent—reported that caregiving regularly impaired their job performance.
- 4 Caregiving affects many generations.** While most caregivers quit to take care of a child, more than a third left to take care of an elderly loved one and 25 percent quit to care of a disabled spouse or relative.



## Myth: Debunked

*Genetic health conditions can't be avoided as people age.*

### **Fact**

*While it's true that genetics play a certain role in each person's body and health, health and wellness is largely in the hands of each individual. Eating right, getting enough exercise and rest all contribute to health aging.*



# Caring for the caregiver

*On an airplane, an oxygen mask descends in front of you. What do you do? As we all know, the first rule is to put on your own oxygen mask before you assist anyone else. Only when we first help ourselves can we effectively help others. Caring for yourself is one of the most important—and one of the most often forgotten—things you can do as a caregiver. When your needs are taken care of, the person you care for will benefit, too.*

*You cannot stop the impact of a chronic or progressive illness or a debilitating injury on someone for whom you care. But there is a great deal that you can do to take responsibility for your personal well-being and to get your own needs met*

## **Tip 1: Reducing personal stress**

*How we perceive and respond to an event is a significant factor in how we adjust and cope with it. The stress you feel is not only the result of your caregiving situation but also the result of your perception of it—whether you see the glass as half-full or half-empty. It is important to remember that you are not alone in your experiences.*

## **Steps to Managing Stress**

1. Recognize warning signs early. These might include irritability, sleep problems, and forgetfulness. Know your own warning signs, and act to make changes. Don't wait until you are overwhelmed.
2. Identify sources of stress. Ask yourself, "What is causing stress for me?" Sources of stress might be that you have too much to do, family disagreements, feelings of inadequacy, or the inability to say no.
3. Identify what you can and cannot change. Remember, we can only change ourselves; we cannot change another person. When you try to change things over which you have no control, you will only increase your sense of frustration. Ask yourself, "What do I have some control over? What can I change?" Even a small change can make a big difference.
4. Take action. Taking some action to reduce stress gives us back a sense of control. Stress reducers can be simple activities like walking and other forms of exercise, gardening, meditation, or having coffee with a friend. Identify some stress reducers that work for you.



# Caring for the caregiver

## Tip 2: Setting goals

*Setting goals or deciding what you would like to accomplish in the next three to six months is an important tool for taking care of yourself.*

Here are some sample goals you might try:

- Take a break from caregiving.
- Get help with caregiving tasks like bathing and preparing meals.
- Engage in activities that will make you feel more healthy.
- Goals are generally too big to work on all at once. We are more likely to reach a goal if we break it down into smaller action steps. Once you've set a goal, ask yourself, "What steps do I take to reach my goal?" Make an action plan by deciding which step you will take first, and when. Then get started!

**Example** (Goal and Action Steps):

**Goal:** Feel more healthy.

**Possible action steps:**

1. Make an appointment for a physical checkup.
2. Take a half-hour break once during the week.
3. Walk three times a week for 10 minutes.

## Tip 3: Seeking Solutions

*Seeking solutions to difficult situations is, of course, one of the most important tools in caregiving. Once you've identified a problem, taking action to solve it can change the situation and also change your attitude to a more positive one, giving you more confidence in your abilities.*

### Steps for Seeking Solutions

1. Identify the problem. Look at the situation with an open mind. The real problem might not be what first comes to mind. For example, you think that the problem is simply that you are tired all the time, when the more basic difficulty is your belief that "no one can care for John like I can." The problem? Thinking that you have to do everything yourself.
2. List possible solutions. One idea is to try a different perspective: "Even though someone else provides help to John in a different way than I do, it can be just as good." Ask a friend to help. Call Family Caregiver Alliance or the Eldercare Locator (see Resources list) and ask about agencies in your area that could help provide care.
3. Select one solution from the list. Then try it!
4. Evaluate the results. Ask yourself how well your choice worked.
5. Try a second solution. If your first idea didn't work, select another. But don't give up on the first; sometimes an idea just needs fine-tuning.
6. Use other resources. Ask friends, family members, and professionals for suggestions.
7. If nothing seems to help, accept that the problem may not be solvable now. You can revisit it at another time.

# Caring for the caregiver

## Tip 4: Communicating Constructively

Being able to communicate constructively is one of a caregiver's most important tools. When you communicate in ways that are clear, assertive, and constructive, you will be heard and get the help and support you need. The box below shows basic guidelines for good communication.

### Communication guidelines

- Use "I" messages rather than "you" messages. Saying "I feel angry" rather than "You made me angry" enables you to express your feelings without blaming others or causing them to become defensive.
- Respect the rights and feelings of others. Do not say something that will violate another person's rights or intentionally hurt the person's feelings. Recognize that the other person has the right to express feelings.
- Be clear and specific. Speak directly to the person. Don't hint or hope the person will guess what you need. Other people are not mind readers. When you speak directly about what you need or feel, you are taking the risk that the other person might disagree or say no to your request, but that action also shows respect for the other person's opinion. When both parties speak directly, the chances of reaching understanding are greater.
- Be a good listener. Listening is the most important aspect of communication.

## Tip 5: Asking for and Accepting Help

*When people have asked if they can be of help to you, how often have you replied, "Thank you, but I'm fine." Many caregivers don't know how to marshal the goodwill of others and are reluctant to ask for help. You may not wish to "burden" others or admit that you can't handle everything yourself.*

### Tips on how to ask

- Consider the person's special abilities and interests. If you know a friend enjoys cooking but dislikes driving, your chances of getting help improve if you ask for help with meal preparation.
- Resist asking the same person repeatedly. Do you keep asking the same person because she has trouble saying no?
- Pick the best time to make a request. Timing is important. A person who is tired and stressed might not be available to help out. Wait for a better time.
- Prepare a list of things that need doing. The list might include errands, yard work, or a visit with your loved one. Let the "helper" choose what she would like to do.
- Be prepared for hesitance or refusal. It can be upsetting for the caregiver when a person is unable or unwilling to help. But in the long run, it would do more harm to the relationship if the person helps only because he doesn't want to upset you. To the person who seems hesitant, simply say, "Why don't you think about it." Try not to take it personally when a request is turned down. The person is turning down the task, not you. Try not to let a refusal prevent you from asking for help again. The person who refused today may be happy to help at another time.

# Caring for the caregiver

## Summing up

Remember, it is not selfish to focus on your own needs and desires when you are a caregiver—it's an important part of the job. You are responsible for your own self-care. Focus on the following self-care practices:

- Learn and use stress-reduction techniques, e.g. meditation, prayer, yoga, Tai Chi.
- Attend to your own healthcare needs.
- Get proper rest and nutrition.
- Exercise regularly, even if only for 10 minutes at a time.
- Take time off without feeling guilty.
- Participate in pleasant, nurturing activities, such as reading a good book, taking a warm bath.
- Seek and accept the support of others.
- Seek supportive counseling when you need it, or talk to a trusted counselor, friend, or pastor.
- Identify and acknowledge your feelings, you have a right to ALL of them.
- Change the negative ways you view situations.
- Set goals.



## Did You Know?

*Most employers underestimate the impact that caregiving has on its workers, with less than one-fourth believing that the demands of caring for a loved one affects job performance.*

*For more information and help, both for the caregiver and aging loved ones, contact your Ulliance Life Advisor EAP for resources, tools, coaching and counseling. 800.448.8326 or log onto **LifeAdvisor.com***

## Improving the Lives of the People We Serve.

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*Stats re: University of California, San Francisco*