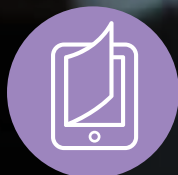




**Comfort  
Keepers®**

Elevating the  
Human Spirit™



**STEP-BY-STEP  
DIGITAL GUIDE**

# Caring for yourself while you care for others

Self-care for family caregivers



# Caring for yourself while you care for others

Whether it be a spouse or parent, caring for a loved one can be a rewarding experience that brings your family together. However, ignoring the feelings of loss, stress, and physical and emotional strain that come with this kind of family caregiving isn't healthy.

We've created this informational guide to help you stay emotionally and physically healthy while you care for your senior loved one. And here's the good news – caring for yourself will help you provide better care to your loved one.



**75%**

of caregivers are female  
– Institute on Aging



# What you'll find in this guide

Learn helpful information and insights to help you and your family member navigate the caregiving journey.

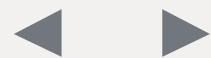
## Jump to a moment

Click on a category below to go directly to that section.

- Compassion Fatigue ▶
- Being Prepared ▶
- Take a Break ▶
- Open Communication ▶
- Caregiver Wellbeing ▶
- Paying for Care ▶

*Look for these icons throughout the guide. Use the forward and back arrows to move through the pages or link to articles for later viewing.*

DIRECTIONAL



BACK NEXT

LINK



## Reach Out

Need to talk? Contact us with any questions; we're here to help you.



"You can't pour from an empty cup.  
Take care of yourself first."  
—Unknown

# What you need to know

Resources to help you prepare and plan



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48%

of caregivers report higher levels of emotional stress  
if they feel they had no choice in taking on the caregiver role

– AARP and National Alliance of Caregivers



TAKEAWAY  
Read: [Compassion Fatigue: What Family  
Caregivers Need to Know](#)

# Understanding compassion fatigue

## What is compassion fatigue?

Compassion and empathy are natural traits in a caregiver, and it's not uncommon for family caregivers to feel that their capacity for helping their parent or spouse is nearly limitless. However, you can't perform Herculean feats of care without also caring for yourself.

It's easy, and quite common, for family caregivers to fall into chronic stress and experience unpleasant feelings concerning the care they're giving. This feeling is called compassion fatigue, and it stems from overexerting your mental, physical, and emotional capacity for others without re-centering and recharging yourself in between.

## Common signs of compassion fatigue

- Exhaustion (physical and emotional)
- Feelings of dread or guilt
- Irritability, anxiety, or anger
- Difficulty sleeping
- Difficulty making decisions
- Feeling disconnected
- Trouble finding meaning in caregiving
- Self-isolation

# Understanding compassion fatigue

## Compassion fatigue vs. burnout

Compassion fatigue is not the same as burnout, although they share some of the same symptoms. Here's the difference: with burnout, caregivers still feel empathy; with compassion fatigue, they lose compassion and empathy for others, even the senior they are caring for. Plus, compassion fatigue usually hits harder and faster than burnout.

## Why is compassion fatigue dangerous?

Compassion fatigue can strain your relationships, break down communication, and provoke resentment toward yourself and those you care about. Compassion fatigue is like an infection; it won't go away without proper treatment. To be strong and healthy, you must be aware of compassion fatigue and how to combat it.



## How to cope with Compassion Fatigue

- Recognize the signs
- Make self-care a part of your routine
- Spend time with friends and maintain social connections
- Join a caregiver support group
- Keep a journal and review it regularly
- Exercise regularly and eat a healthy diet
- Walk, meditate, or spend time on your hobbies
- Discuss your feelings with a counselor or therapist
- Seek professional in-home care to give yourself time for self-care



# Being prepared brings peace of mind

As a caregiver, juggling the health and needs of your loved one can be daunting. Mindful discussions and organizing in advance can help keep both of you on the same page and reduce the stress that decision-making can cause. Planning with your parent or spouse means their preferences are considered. This way, they feel heard in circumstances of finances, physician visits, loss of driving privileges, and preventing home safety incidents.



TAKEAWAY  
Read: [Putting Your Loved One's Affairs in Order](#)



## Physician visits

*"Do you have any questions?"*

It can be difficult to think of questions to ask on the spot. If you're accompanying your loved one to a doctor's appointment, or even if they are going alone, preparing questions for the doctor in advance is a good idea. We created a [list of questions](#) to help you get started.

## Home safety incidents

Many family caregivers worry about their senior loved one when they are home alone. The decision to seek in-home care is sometimes triggered when a senior has a fall or other home safety incident. You can help your loved one make their home safe and accessible by ensuring ample walking space between furniture and good lighting throughout the home. You can also fix trip hazards like rugs, loose carpet, or uneven ground.

# Being prepared brings peace of mind

## Loss of driving privileges

For seniors, driving equals independence and the freedom to go where they want, when they want – even if it is only for weekly grocery shopping and errands. So, when you notice that your loved one is losing their ability to drive safely, it's important to talk about it in a non-confrontational way that shows your concern without damaging their pride. Remember, you are not just asking them for their keys; you're asking them to give up some of their independence.

Warning signs that may mean it's time to act include:



Poor driving at night, or drastically reduced peripheral vision even if 20/20 with corrective lenses



Struggling to drive at higher speeds, or erratic driving such as abrupt lane changes, braking or acceleration, hitting curbs, missing turns, or barely missing cars or pedestrians



Getting lost frequently, even on familiar roads, and having trouble reading street signs or navigating directions



Acting startled, claiming that cars or pedestrians seem to appear out of nowhere



At-fault accidents, more frequent near-crashes, dents and scrapes; traffic tickets or warnings from authorities



Not using turn signals or keeping them on without changing lanes, lane drifting, driving on the wrong side of the road



# Give yourself a break

While you may feel that you can do anything, you can't do everything. When you accept help and give yourself a break from your caregiving duties, you refresh your mind and body—and it makes you a better caregiver overall.

## What Is respite care?

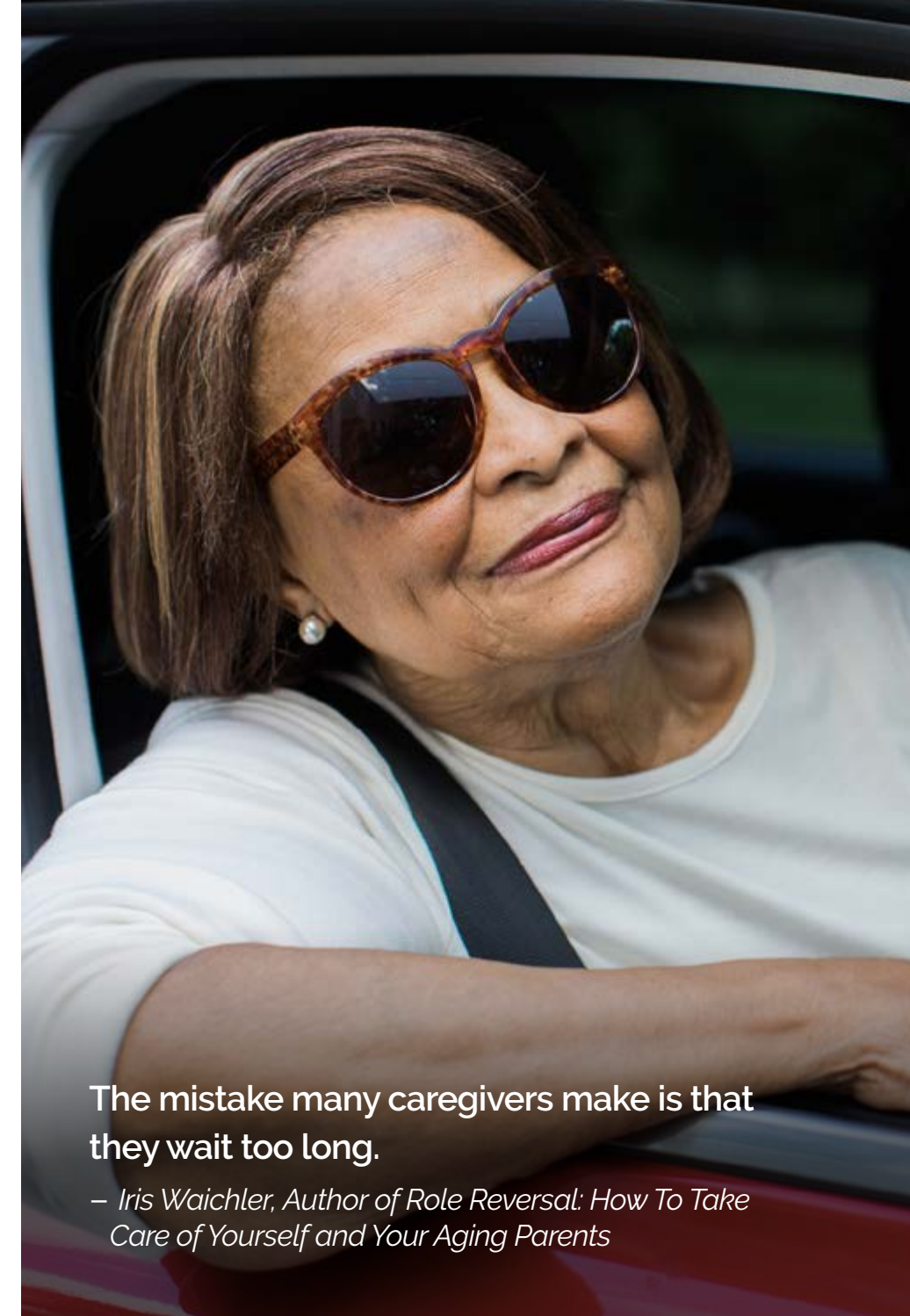
For family caregivers, accepting help is a necessity. Even with a strong support system in place, there are times when caregivers take on too much responsibility to avoid placing a burden on those around them. Respite care provides short-term relief for family caregivers. It can be arranged for an afternoon as part of your weekly routine or for several days a week.

## Remove the worry

When caring for others, it's easy to become overwhelmed. But when taking time for yourself, it's not always easy to put your obligations out of your mind and relax. Respite care can give you relief from your care responsibilities while ensuring your loved one is well taken care of by a professional caregiver.

## Reasons for respite care include:

- Needing to run errands on specific days of the week
- Taking a much-deserved vacation
- Needing to take care of mental or physical health
- Avoiding potential burnout for primary caregivers
- Nurturing your other personal and family relationships



**The mistake many caregivers make is that they wait too long.**

– Iris Waichler, Author of *Role Reversal: How To Take Care of Yourself and Your Aging Parents*



**TAKEAWAY**  
Read: [When It Is Time to Consider Respite Care](#)



# Give yourself a break

With respite care, you can rediscover the joy you first found in caring for your spouse, parent, or other loved one. Compassionate professional caregivers will take care of your loved one so you can take care of yourself and help avoid compassion fatigue.

## Respite care provides:

- Professional care for your loved one so that you can take an extended break or vacation
- Activities tailored to your loved one's interests to engage them physically, mentally, and emotionally while you are away
- Assistance with tasks such as cooking, cleaning, bathing, dressing, and shopping
- Transportation to appointments and events when you aren't available so your loved one can remain social and active







# Communication is key

## Starting family conversations

Keeping your family on the same page regarding your loved one's care can feel like walking a tightrope. Factors of distance, involvement, interpersonal relationships, and availability can make coordination and conversations difficult. But starting a family conversation is easier than you think.

## Division of caregiving responsibilities

Ideally, every family member could give equal time and care for their senior loved one, but issues of distance, work, and family schedules rarely make that possible.



### TAKEAWAY

Read: [Starting the Conversation](#)

Read: [Long Distance Caregiving](#)

## To maintain family harmony, it's vital that family members:

1. Accept the amount of help that each person can give
2. Let the family member in closest proximity be the care lead
3. Be communicative and share problems when they start, not after they've built up
4. Know how to resolve issues with family openly, without talking behind backs
5. Be supportive of each other and acknowledge the strengths each person brings
6. Include your parent or spouse in conversations about their care





# Communicating with seniors

It's essential that older adults keep a sense of independence and autonomy so they can live their lives to the fullest. This means that, rather than speaking at seniors or for them, we talk with them. Ask questions, listen, and make sure their wants and needs are known.

## Older adults may face communication challenges such as:

- Hearing loss, reduced vision, and other sensory changes
- Generational differences and conflicting personal communication styles
- Cognitive decline and slower information processing
- Health conditions such as stroke, dementia, or Parkinson's disease
- Environmental factors such as background noise or poor lighting

Keeping these factors in mind when communicating with a parent or older loved one can turn challenging conversations into mutually beneficial experiences that bring you and your loved one closer.



# Be kind to yourself as a caregiver

The act of caregiving is foundational to human existence. It's our nature to do whatever we can for the people we love most—whether we are parents or children, relatives or friends. When reflecting on their lives, many people feel that caring for others is one of the most emotionally satisfying experiences.

Comfort Keepers® and the Stanford Center on Longevity produced a [collaborative research study](#) to find trends in the emotional health of family caregivers. The study found that the severity of illness was not the main cause of caregiver compassion fatigue but rather the caregiver's inability to pursue their social goals and friendships. This underlines the importance of emotional wellbeing for family caregivers.

So, although caring for a loved one can be a joyful and rewarding experience, it's essential to know when you need a break. Taking time for respite and self-care can do wonders for your wellbeing and your relationship with your loved one. Sharing your struggle with others, asking for help, and building a solid support system is essential to caring for yourself.



AARP ESTIMATES  
**47.9 MILLION**

Americans provided unpaid care to an adult in 2020

– AARP



# Paying for Care

## Evaluating options

Financial considerations can be one of the biggest considerations for families when caring for a loved one. There are many aspects to consider, including your own financial costs, family responsibilities, and career.

Depending on your family's needs, you may only require a few hours a week of personal care or companionship from an in-home care provider, or you may need full-time help. When you start considering care options, questions around costs tend to follow.

## Follow these steps to assess your payment options:

1. Evaluate your loved one's savings
2. Explore in-home care options based on your needs
3. Talk to a financial advisor
4. Consider the options to the right

Payment options can include Medicare, Medicaid (if you qualify), long-term care insurance, Veterans Administration benefits, and out-of-pocket (from your savings and assets).

## Medicare

Covers long-term care in limited circumstances, such as immediately following a hospital stay. It also covers short-term, physician-prescribed home health care for skilled nursing; physical, occupational, and speech therapy; medical social services; and personal care.

## Medicaid and State Programs

For those with limited financial resources, Medicaid may cover some in-home care services.

## Veterans Administration Aid and Attendance Pension Benefit

Veterans may qualify for VA benefits to cover some of the cost of in-home care and surviving spouses may qualify for respite care.



# Long-term care insurance

Purchased independently of other insurance policies, Long Term Care (LTC) insurance helps cover future long-term care expenses. Rates for such policies can vary substantially; some factors include your age and general health. The key to saving money and preparing for care is to be proactive.

There are two types of long-term care (LTC) policies. Traditional LTC policies function similarly to auto or home insurance policies. You make premium payments for as long as the policy is active and can file claims if you require the covered services. Another option is to select a policy with a waiting period between the time when you begin to need care and when benefits become effective and include inflation protection.

This [article by AARP](#) highlights the basics of LTC insurance and can help you prepare for a meeting with a consultant or financial agent.



Many people buy a policy and then don't look at it. But you should refer to it often before a time of crisis hits.

– Jessica Thomas, Consultant





## More resources

What's next? To help you create a clear path for moving forward, we've included resource links to help you research caregiving options. If you ever have questions—or want someone to talk to—please don't hesitate to reach out. Thanks for taking the time to read our guide, and remember to look for the small moments of joy in every day.

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