



Caregiving for Family Members: Stages & Resources

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This subject is of special meaning and immediacy at this time in my life. I witnessed my mother's role as a devoted wife evolve when she also became my father's devoted caregiver. As you will read below, that stage often doesn't remain a permanent one. As my father's health continued to decline, he entered a new stage which required other caregiving resources, beyond what my mother could alone provide.

Families are typically the primary source of care and support as we age. While doctors, nurses, social workers, and other professionals may call it "caregiving", most people simply consider providing help to an older loved one, being a loving spouse or a good adult child.



Caregiving is a catchall phrase that encompasses an important and extensive set of activities that evolve (sometimes slowly, other times rapidly) with the needs of the care recipient.

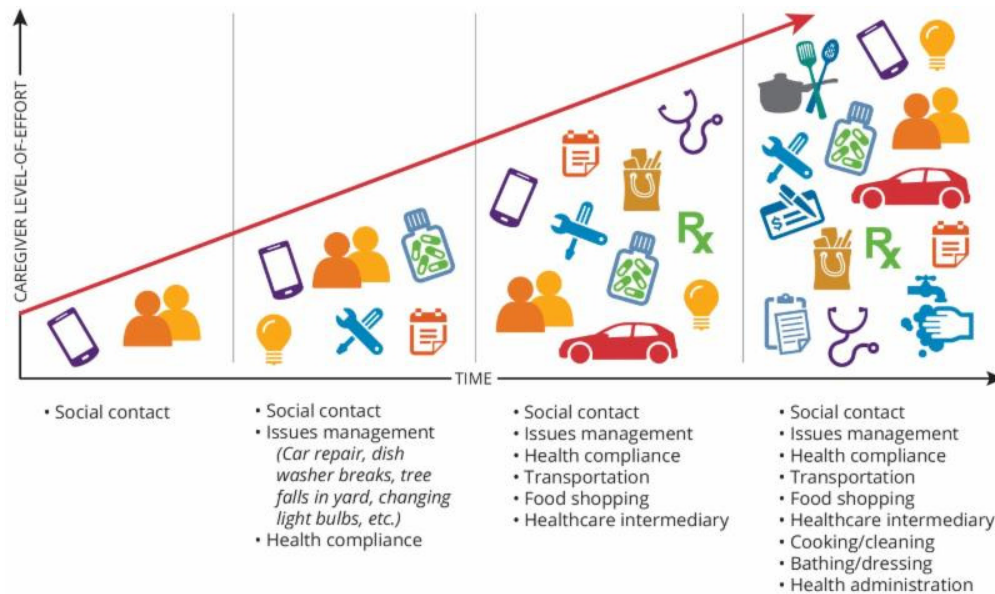
What is Caregiving?

Caregiving, or informal care, is when a family member or friend provides unpaid help with a wide range of tasks to assist an older adult in his or her daily life. These activities can be as simple as giving a ride to the grocery store and cleaning out the refrigerator, or as complex as managing multiple medications and administering care to a wound.

The nature of caregiving and associated tasks change as the care recipient's condition evolves.

Caregiving Gets More Complex Over Time

Four Levels of Caregiving



At first, caregiving may look like periodic, simple phone calls or check-ins to maintain social contact. While still independent, an older loved one may need to be reminded to refill prescriptions or take medications on time, in the correct dose, with the appropriate meal.

Over time, other tasks may emerge, such as providing transportation to the doctor's office or routine home maintenance to change a light bulb. In many instances, a caregiver may serve as a healthcare advocate or intermediary, speaking with physicians, pharmacists, and others.

As new tasks are added and existing activities still remain, the demand of the caregiver's time, effort, and capacity increases to include a growing and diverse array of activities. Caregivers may also provide assistance with financial responsibilities such as paying bills or balancing the household checkbook, especially in situations with cognitive decline. Increasing physical frailty or limitations may require the caregiver to help with activities of daily living, such as washing, dressing, and toileting, adding significant physical and emotional demand to the caregiver.

Faces of Caregivers

In my mother's situation, she found learning from others' experiences about what to expect in the future as my father's medical conditions progressed, to be extremely helpful. She encouraged me to suggest people seek and use support groups for particular ailments that a family member is faced with.

Statistics about those caring for someone 50+:

- One in 10 care for a spouse or partner (11%)
- More than half care for a parent or parent-in-law (55%)
- One in four care for someone age 85 or older
- 14% care for a non-relative

- Average age of a 50+ caregiver is 74.7 years old
- 60% of caregivers are female
- Six in 10 caregivers are between the ages of 35 and 64 (59%)

Costs of Caring

While providing care to an elderly family member or friend is most often done out of love and loyalty, there is a cost to caring. Caregiving affects time, physical and emotional well-being, and finances.

According to the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP, the average time dedicated to caregiving for someone age 50 or older is 24.1 hours per week. However, the amount of time dedicated to caregiving varies among individuals' situations and is dependent on multiple factors.

For example, 22% of caregivers caring for someone age 50+ spend 41 hours or more per week providing care. The physical and emotional well-being of the caregiver is often not acknowledged, yet one in five caregivers report high physical strain and four in 10 caregivers report high emotional stress.

Further more, one in five caregivers report financial strain from caregiving. Caregivers spend on average \$5,531 out-of-pocket annually on caregiving-related expenses, such as household goods, food and meals, travel and transportation costs, and medical expenses.

Where Caregivers Can Find Help

Becoming a caregiver can happen over time or sometimes instantly, as the result of a health event or accident. There is no training or manual for providing care. Consequently, caregivers often feel alone and left to navigate an unknown set of problems and a maze of possible services. Below are selected organizations and types of service providers that may help caregivers with a range of tasks.

Area Agencies on Aging: Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) are experts on all aspects of aging. Created by a Federal law, AAAs help older Americans and their caregivers live quality lives with independence and dignity. There are over 600 AAAs in the United States providing a wide range of services including meals-on-wheels, transportation, home care, and general support.

Alzheimer's Association Chapters:

The Alzheimer's Association provides supportive programs, services, and information throughout the United States. Local chapters help people with Alzheimer's and their caregivers deal with the disease and its impact on their lives.

Sharing Economy Services: On-demand service providers that can be organized and requested by smartphone or online are widely available in major metropolitan areas. Examples include Lyft and Uber for transportation as well as wide variety of other firms that can assist with home maintenance (TaskRabbit), homecare (Honor), home grocery delivery (Peapod), and other services.

Home Health Aides and Home Care Providers: Home health aides typically provide assistance with a range of activities, such as bathing, ambulation, transferring, cooking, eating, housekeeping, and basic health services. Home

care assistants help with household chores and personal care. There are both for-profit and non-profit service providers.

Website Resources for Caregivers:

- [AARP Home & Family Caregiving](#)
- [Alzheimers.gov](#)
- [Alzheimerâ€™s & Dementia Caregiver Center](#)
- [ARCH National Respite Network](#)
- [Eldercare locator](#)
- [Family Caregiver Alliance](#)
- [National Alliance for Caregiving](#)
- [National Association of Area Agencies on Aging](#)
- [Caregiver Action Network](#)
- [WISER's Financial Steps for Caregivers](#)
- [Lotsa Helping Hands](#)
- [Carezone](#)

Sources:

The Hartford Funds/Joseph F. Courghlin, PhD, Director, MIT AgeLab.
MIT AgeLab, 2017.

[AARP & National Alliance for Caregiving. \(2015\)](#). Caregivers of older adults: A focused look at those caring for someone age 50+. Most recent data available.

[Evercare & National Alliance for Caregivers. \(2007\)](#). Evercare study of family caregivers - what they spend, what they sacrifice. Most recent data available.

My staff and I deeply appreciate the continuing opportunity to work with you. Please let me know if you have any questions or requests. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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