

Elder Care Across Miles!

Caring for an elder parent can be a challenge. Add in the circumstance of long distance, the challenge can become overwhelming even for the most dedicated children.

Here are a few strategies that can help:



Plan before a crisis. At your next visit set up a support system of friends, relatives, and neighbors that you can call and ask to check in on your parents. Also get to know and make a list of their doctors and the nurse that manages the doctors' offices.

Copy all essential papers. This includes medical, financial and legal information, be sure to include Health insurance policies, Social Security numbers, medicinal histories, wills, power of attorney paperwork and health care proxies.

Get a complete diagnosis. Sit in on a complete physical and mental assessment with a geriatric doctor. You need to be present in the examination room while all aspects are being discussed, otherwise privacy rules may prohibit the doctor from discussing medical information with you. Your parent may have to sign a release of medical information form in order for you to get any information.

Involve the whole family. One person may be the central contact person but make sure all family members know that they are needed in caring for the elderly parent especially when they live so far away. Start a coordination chart so that family members can alternate visits and give a list of specific items that need to be checked on or taken care of.

Explore the world of community services. Most communities have volunteer resources that are sponsored by senior centers and churches.

Seek professional geriatric management help. A Geriatric Care Manager can help your family with the coordination of health care services. Their duties may include overseeing the household, financial, legal, medical appointments, health insurance paper work, social work and counseling.

Take care of yourself. Sometimes caring for another can be overwhelming. Make sure to incorporate time for yourself that includes exercise, special fun activities, restful down time and attend your scheduled Dr. appointments.

Honor your parents. Let your parent know that you are there to help make life easier for them. Remember; your parent is an adult and they need to have the freedom to make their own decisions, even if you feel it is not the correct decision or you feel it is foolish. (Unless dementia has set in, then you may need to step forward and act as the controlling adult in that situation.)

Make the most of your visits:

- ◆ Verify all bills are being paid on time.
- ◆ Schedule an appointment to accompany your parent to a doctor visit.
- ◆ Meet with all healthcare individuals or volunteers that come into your parent's home. This gives you the opportunity to go over schedules and care items.
- ◆ If your parent is still driving have them drive you somewhere so you can make sure that they are still able to drive safely.
- ◆ Replace all light bulbs with a long life variety.
- ◆ Dispose of all clutter around the house and yard to help avoid falls.
- ◆ Organize and Label drawers and cabinets. Use large bold letters when labeling.
- ◆ Make an updated list of current medications and the dosage that is to be taken. Keep list with medications and an extra copy in a personal bag or wallet that your parent will have when they go to the doctor or hospital.
- ◆ Remove any out of date prescriptions that are not currently prescribed by your parents' physician.
- ◆ Make sure all food is not expired and there are plenty of their healthy favorite foods in their home.
- ◆ Check the house and take care of maintenance items including testing the smoke detectors and changing the batteries.
- ◆ Take the car to be inspected by a mechanic, have oil changed and replace batteries or tires if needed.
- ◆ Introduce yourself to the neighbors and your parent's friends.
- ◆ Leave an extra key and your phone number with a trustworthy neighbor.

At any time that you feel your loved one is not able to care for their self or if the care they are receiving is questionable, contact your EAP or a geriatric professional, they can assist you in exploring other options that will help meet their special needs.

Life is a circle . . .

At birth we are cared for.
We are wrapped in warm fuzzy blankets.
We are watched with a cautious eye.
We are told what to do.

In the blink of an eye. . .

The roles are changed.
Now we are caring for those who cared for us.
We wrap them in warm fuzzy blankets.
We watch them with a cautious eye.
We tell them what to do.

If we are lucky life will always be a circle.

~ Author unknown ~