

CAREGIVING TIPS FROM AARP

Caring for a Loved One: Your Journey Starts Here

Caring for a family member or close friend is one of the most meaningful roles you'll ever take on. Every caregiving journey is unique. You might be:

- Checking in regularly
- Providing transportation
- Shopping or preparing meals
- Helping with housework
- Assisting with personal care
- Performing medical or nursing tasks
- Coordinating healthcare and support services

Whatever your role looks like, planning is key. A personalized caregiving plan gives you a clear, flexible framework—one that can evolve as your loved one's needs and available resources change. With the right plan in place, you'll be better prepared to support them and care for yourself along the way.

CREATE YOUR CAREGIVING PLAN AND UPDATE IT PERIODICALLY AS YOUR LOVED ONE'S SITUATION EVOLVES.

Start by assessing your loved ones' situation, create or adjust your caregiving plan in line with their wishes and evolving needs. Components of your plan include:

- How your loved ones will be supported to remain as independent as possible for as long as possible with optimal quality of life and adequate socialization.
- How their care will be coordinated, including who will care for them and when. How their finances will be handled.
- Who will make legal decisions for them if they are unable.
- Who will be the medical power of attorney?
- Are there advanced directives in place?
- How your loved one be kept safe.
- How their health conditions will be managed.
- Where they will live.
- How their transportation will be handled.
- How agencies, organizations and professionals can provide support.
- How they will be cared for at the end of their life and how their assets and personal belongings will be handled after death.

BUILD YOUR CAREGIVING TEAM

Once you have developed the caregiving plan, determine how you will implement it. Generally, family members will not be able to meet all the needs. We encourage you to think more broadly about your team and the resources available to meet the needs. You will consider:

- Which caregiving needs are already met?
- Which needs and roles can you fulfill?
- Where are there gaps and who can fill them?
 - Consider family, neighbors, friends and volunteers from local organizations, universities, or your loved ones' faith community.
 - Contact services, supports, organizations and agencies can help fill the gaps.
 - Engage paid professionals, such as caregivers, home health aides and others who help care for your loved ones' personal care and daily needs.

People who help and support you so you can fulfill your caregiving role. As you create and manage your team, be sure to:

- Communicate the caregiving plan, including your loved ones' goals and wishes.
- Create clear roles and responsibilities.
- Discuss how the team will communicate and be managed.
- Show appreciation and support for your team members.

If you are a long-distance caregiver, it is especially important for you to have team members who are located where your loved ones live and who can be your “eyes and ears” on the ground, reporting to you about how they are doing and any changes or problems that arise.

CARE FOR THE CAREGIVER

Caregiving can be very rewarding and also very draining. While your loved ones are the center of their caregiving plans, you are equally important; there wouldn't be care for them without you. That's why making a conscious effort to care for yourself while caring for others isn't selfish or optional—it's practical.

- Take care of your mental health because you may experience a roller coaster of emotions ranging from joy, satisfaction and triumph to guilt, stress, anxiety, depression, grief and burnout. >
- Consider counseling or therapy, which can help with the emotional and mental strain of caregiving.
- Check your health insurance to find out what your coverage and costs are and try to find a counselor who understands family caregiving. >
- Connect with other family caregivers via local in-person facilitated caregiver support groups, virtual groups that meet online with video chat, or social media groups that can be accessed at any time.
 - Arrange for respite care for loved ones so you can get breaks from caregiving, creating time for self-care and rest, going to appointments, seeing friends or simply doing nothing.
 - Maintain your identity because it's easy to feel like you've lost yourself in caregiving. You will likely need to make sacrifices but try to adapt and keep up with friends, hobbies, other relationships and home life on some level.
 - Keep working if you can, so you don't have a financial crisis in the future. Take advantage of employer supports which may include flexible work options; employee assistance programs (EAPs) that assist with counseling, services, referrals, legal matters and more; employee resource groups or support groups for caregivers; caregiving leave; and human resources counseling about your employee benefits.
 - If you need to take an extended time off work, explore your eligibility for family and medical leave via the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), a state-mandated policy or an employer policy.
 - Protect your own financial security now and in the future. Financial advisers can help you monitor your finances and ensure you don't take on too many caregiving costs or assume debt.