

Caregivers: Do Unto Others



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An astounding statistic was recently released by AARP: Some 42 million Americans between the ages of 40-60 are caring for older adults, in many cases, their parents. Of this group of “unprofessional caregivers” roughly 60 percent are spending an average of 10 hours per week providing “hands-on” support.

Here’s the real kicker: The remaining 40% of adult children devote a whopping 40+ hours a week to the complete medical guardianship of their parent(s), with the primary goal of *eliminating the possibility of institutionalizing* their parent(s).

Being able to provide a lifeline to an aging parent is in many ways a life-affirming and humbling experience, but this very important assignment can also come with a host of complications.

“Caregiver stress” (often referred to as *caregiver breakdown*) is officially defined as “the emotional and physical strain of caregiving, which manifests itself in both physical and emotional ways.” Chief among the many stresses is loneliness, as the hours spent providing one-on-one care draws caregivers away from their social life, as well as missed time with their own families.

Studies have shown that caregivers are more susceptible to symptoms of depression and anxiety, have more long-term health problems, have higher incidences of obesity and may be at greater risk for decreased mental efficiency.

In order to successfully take care of someone else, AARP stresses that caregivers must first see to their own needs, or a disturbing burnout is almost sure to follow. Rules of thumb: Follow a sensible eating plan, stay connected with friends, keep as organized as possible, and take breaks whenever possible.

From my experience, the two most useful tips are utilizing community resources such as the Athens Area Council on Aging (706-549-4850; www.accaging.org) and being totally aware that this isn’t something you can do all by yourself. Resist the urge to play super-hero.

Don’t hesitate to reach out to other family members or friends for assistance, and take advantage of any respite you can manage. A strong suggestion is to consider a full-service, professional agency. *Remain At Home Senior Care*, for instance, employs licensed, highly trained professionals who can provide for a variety of seniors’ needs, from the simply social, to administering medicine and specialized physical care.

Bottom-line: Enjoy your parent/loved one in the context which makes both of you more comfortable and, most importantly, use your precious time to create meaningful and lasting memories. There may be no greater challenge in a person’s life than to see that their parents are able to maintain as much responsibility and independence as they desire, and it can often feel like a lonely and thankless chore. But when that time comes, few of us would personally prefer the alternative to ceding control – hopefully, the care you give will be equal to the care you receive.

Keeping the promise,



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