

## ELDER CARE SUPPORT RESOURCE PACKET

Nearly 20 percent of U.S. households are involved in some form of helping elderly family members or friends with their daily routine. If you're part of this group, you know that caring for an aging parent or friend has its rewards and its trials. We know your family, work, leisure time, personal finances and, in some cases, physical and mental health can be affected when you're providing care for someone else. Get tips on how to provide care for another while still caring for yourself.

### HOW DO I CARE FOR MY AGING PARENT?

**Don't parent your parents:** As your parents age and become frail or ill, resist the urge to regard them as children. Instead, think of caregiving as a family business and yourself as an executive with problems to solve.

"Treat your parents as having a legitimate role. This empowers a partnership," Dr. Cohen says. "Your role will be to take control, but it's not with the same authority you use with your children." For example: Your mother can't see well anymore but insists on driving. Instead of taking away her car keys, sit down with her and begin a dialogue. Say, "Mom, I'm worried about you. Aren't you worried about your driving?"

**Don't do it alone:** Because every family is different, there's no one right way of caring for aging parents. "But there are wrong ways, and the worst one is to do it alone," Dr. Cohen says. The demands of caregiving can become so immense that they can affect your health, leading to illness and depression. "Half of all caregivers get depressed in the course of care-giving," Dr. Cohen says. "In turn, depression takes a toll on their physical health, affecting their job performance and can even lead to the abuse of the parents they're caring for."

To manage caregiving effectively, seek help and advice from professionals and your siblings. For example: Consult a financial planner or attorney regarding your parents' estate, living wills and other legal matters. Work with physicians to understand your parents' health problems and the treatments they're getting. Talk to a pharmacist to learn the potential side effects of their medications and to make sure those medications are compatible.

Meet with your siblings over breakfast, not at the end of the day when everyone's tired. Describe the problem you're facing and share your feelings about it with them. Let them do the same. "Besides determining what's workable for your parents, your goal should be to find the best way for everyone to work together," Dr. Cohen says.

**Stay optimistic:** Unlike caring for children, caring for aging parents, particularly ill ones, involves the reality that their deaths are approaching. Nonetheless, "let yourself be guided by a tempered optimism," Dr. Cohen says. "Don't let your hope for the future die too fast."

Within limits, there are things you can do now to maximize comfort and improve your parents' quality of life. "You can convey support and show affection by giving your mother a new chenille throw because you know she'll enjoy its softness and warmth," she says. "Even holding someone's hand is a powerful way to ease pain and loneliness."

All told, "caring is more than loving," she says. "It's a series of discreet skills that involve listening to your parents, making decisions about their needs and taking action, if necessary. And it has mutual benefits. Through caring, we can learn more about ourselves."

## **MANAGING AN AGING PARENT'S HEALTH CARE**

As adults move into middle age, many face an issue for which few are adequately prepared: the care of aging parents. Whether your parents live alone or with you and your family, whether they are residents of a retirement community or are patients in a health care facility, you may be called upon to make difficult choices in the years ahead.

You can take steps to simplify these decisions. Below are some tips that can help you manage the care of an aging parent.

### **Evaluate your parents' financial health**

You and your parents should sit down for a frank discussion of health care financing -- including insurance coverage, deductibles and procedures for reimbursement -- before an occasion for medical care arises. Keep careful track of annual health care expenses in order to more accurately anticipate future expenses.

### **Create an informal support system**

If your parents live on their own -- particularly, if they live in another city -- an informal support system of friends and neighbors is essential. Whether a next-door neighbor, family friend or out of town relative, the members of this support system should regularly "check in" with your parents, whether by telephone or by a personal visit. Be sure that each member of the support system has the telephone numbers of all other members.

### **Explore available community services**

National, state, local and private organizations offer a wealth of elder care services. The U.S. Administration on Aging (AOA) is a federal agency that provides free information on elder care services ([www.aoa.gov](http://www.aoa.gov)). Check the telephone book for your state's Agency on Aging. Another information resource is the AOA's Eldercare Locator, which acts as a clearinghouse for a variety of services, including home-delivered meals, transportation, legal assistance, housing options, adult day care, and social and recreational activities. And don't forget to contact local religious institutions, hospitals and senior citizen centers for additional information.

### **Consider a care manager**

Care management services are available to help caregivers locate and coordinate social services. Every care management organization operates differently, but typically, the organization will evaluate the older person's situation, make recommendations, arrange appropriate services and keep family members informed. Keep in mind that private care management organizations are not governmentally regulated. To locate a care manager in your area, call Claremont EAP at 800-834-3773 and ask to speak with one of our elder care specialists. You can also visit the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers website at [www.caremanager.org](http://www.caremanager.org).

### **Don't forget support for the caregiver**

Caring for an aging parent can be a stressful and emotionally overwhelming experience. Call Claremont EAP for one-on-one mental health counseling to get the support you need to support your loved ones. Additional services are available to help families cope: Children of Aging Parents (CAPS) is a nonprofit national organization that publishes a newsletter and other materials for caregivers, provides information about support groups across the country, and offers a starter packet for people who would like to begin a support group in their own community. Visit the CAPS website at [www.caps4caregivers.org](http://www.caps4caregivers.org).

Source: Health Ink & Vitality Communications, 2005

## WHAT ARE MY ELDER CARE OPTIONS?

### Home-Based Services

Home health services allow seniors to remain in their own homes or in your home. Often coordinated through a home health agency, these services may include household help, physical therapists, social workers and skilled nursing. Community organizations also provide many free or reduced-cost home health services, including a friendly visitor program, emergency telephone response systems, meals-on-wheels and transportation.

### Adult Health Day Care

Adult day care centers care for adults who are unable to remain at home alone during the day. For working people with frail parents, adult day care can be a compassionate alternative to 24-hour nursing home care. There are adult social day care centers that focus on the social and emotional needs of the elder but are more structured than a senior center. Social day care provides structured day supervision that includes enjoyable activities for the elder.

### Adult Foster Care

These are programs that provide elders with a room, board and personal care.

### Nursing Homes

Nursing homes provide 24-hour skilled nursing services to individuals who need extended care but not hospitalization. Nursing homes generally offer different levels of care, ranging from custodial care for those who need help with personal care, to skilled nursing care for those who require intensive care and supervision by a registered nurse.

### Retirement Housing

Residential complexes for seniors provide housing in a non-institutionalized setting, with supportive services and skilled nursing.

### Respite Care

These programs provide occasional, temporary assistance to you or your elder's caregiver.

Source: Health Ink & Vitality Communications, 2005

Claremont distributes this information to provide employees with useful information on a variety of topics. If you have concerns about these or other behavioral health issues, you can call Claremont to arrange for assistance. You will be directed to an appropriate, experienced professional who can offer guidance in a variety of work and personal matters. **For confidential help, call: 800-834-3773 or visit [www.claremonteap.com](http://www.claremonteap.com).**

## HOW DO I CHOOSE A HOUSING OPTION?

Regardless of what the facility is called, check it out thoroughly before making a decision. The types of facilities listed below range from informal home-share arrangements to commercial enterprises, government-sponsored facilities, and housing options administered by nonprofit organizations. Some are licensed or accredited, others are not.

Accreditation is an evaluation of a facility's operation against a set of standards. The Continuing Care Accreditation Commission--a membership organization of continuing care communities--is one such organization.

Licensing is an evaluation of a facility's operation in accordance with government regulations. About half of the states currently regulate assisted living facilities.

Many skilled and intermediate care nursing facilities are accredited to accept patients under the Medicare and/or Medicaid programs, which means that they must meet certain standards and provide certain services.

Regardless of these considerations, you are responsible, in large part, for ensuring that the facility is the right one for your spouse, relative or friend.

Even if you are not thinking about housing options in the foreseeable future, it is wise to have several in mind in case an emergency arises and you need temporary care for your relative. Home care agencies often do not have staff available to fill in on short notice, and you may need the services of a long-term care facility.

You can:

- Start your preliminary search by phone.
- Visit those facilities that have the services your care receiver wants and needs.
- Take your older relative to see the facility. Better yet, visit several and let your relative make the final choice, if at all possible.

If your relative is able to make sound decisions, and does not like any of the housing options or does not want to move into a facility after visiting several, keep looking or further explore the possibility of home care in her home or yours. Use a checklist (this checklist can be used as a general guide for all types of housing) to ensure that the housing arrangement is the right one for your relative.

Source: Health Ink & Vitality Communications, 2005

For confidential help with elder care,  
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