



EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE
PROGRAM

Stay Connected to Remain Effective - How to Prevent Caregiver Isolation

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Senior Management Services

It is easy for family caregivers to become isolated as a result of their chronically ill relative's ongoing need for practical help or supervision due to physical or mental impairment. For instance, caregivers may have to give up a job, volunteer work, or group recreational activities in order to provide fulltime care. Over time they also may lose touch with friends because the heavy demands of caregiving limit their time and energy for nurturing relationships and their ability to get out of the house.

All too easily, they become disengaged from formal and informal social networks and stress-relieving leisure activities. Unfortunately, family support is often minimal or absent, due to societal trends that include delayed marriage, decreased family size and increased mobility. Even if adult children live nearby, they are likely to be raising a family and holding down a job and therefore have limited time to help Mom and Dad.

Separation from others fosters loneliness and may precipitate depression, a common affliction among caregivers. While sustaining all relationships may be impossible, close relationships—a vital source of pleasure, validation, and practical support—need to be nurtured.

The following are some ways to prevent or overcome isolation in order to avoid burnout:

- Take the initiative and invite friends over. Don't wait for them to call or drop in.
- Accept offers of help and ask other family members to share the load. Don't try to shield them from the reality of your situation. Give them the opportunity to pitch in and be specific about what you need.
- Keep in touch with out-of-area loved ones through phone calls, letters, or email.
- Nowadays, just about everyone has a cell phone. However, if you don't, consider purchasing a cell phone so you don't miss calls and can multitask while conversing. Set-up your voice message system so that family and friends can leave messages when you're not available.
- Join a community support group (some offer concurrent care) to connect with other caregivers. Information on caregiver groups can be obtained from your local hospital, community social workers, and local community information service. At the very least, subscribe to a caregiving magazine or caregiving website newsletter that offers practical advice and the assurance that you are not alone in the challenges you face.

- Consider in-home respite provided by a healthcare aide employed by a government agency or hired directly through a home healthcare agency, an individual hired under a private arrangement, or a trained volunteer (for example, from the Alzheimer's Association).
- Investigate adult daycare programs as well as residential care homes that have a respite (short stay) program (the latter so you can attend out-of-town event or take a vacation). It's also a great way for your loved one to "test out" the facility. To locate such resources, contact your local office on aging or the nonprofit organization associated with your loved one's disease.
- If mobility issues prevent your relative from accessing day programming or accompanying you out into the community, rent or buy a walker or wheelchair if necessary. Get an adapted van that will accommodate a wheelchair or register with the local accessible transportation service.
- If your loved one can safely be left alone but you are anxious about the prospect, supply him or her with a cell phone so you can stay in touch.
- An emergency response system may also help to put your mind at ease.

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For additional information about Eldercare, please contact Quest at 1-800-364-6352.
