



## **Taking Care of the Caregiver**

The holidays add a lot to our plates. Between work parties, attending children's events, participating in the neighborhood's cookie exchange, wrapping presents and setting the picture-perfect holiday setting at home, it's no wonder why they call it "the most wonderful time of the year." For the family caregiver, this time of year can be especially stressful as you try to balance caring for your aging parents as well as manage your home and work schedule. According to the [National Center for Biotechnology Information](#), on average, those caring for a loved one over the age of 50 are 47 years old themselves and working at least part-time. Most family caregivers are women, but at least 40% of caregivers are men.

Family caregivers often report feeling unprepared to provide care for their loved one and have inadequate knowledge regarding how to deliver proper care. Family caregivers are often at a loss when it comes to accessing and utilizing available community resources due to an unfamiliarity with the type and amount of care their loved one needs. As a result, family caregivers often take on too much, thus neglecting their own health care needs to assist their loved one. As the year ends, here are a few ideas on how to take care of the caregiver.

### **Join a Support Group**

Find and join a support group that shares a common concern. Whether it's an Alzheimer's or dementia support group, or a support group focused on family caregivers, connecting with other individuals who are in a similar situation to yours can provide you with an outlet to vent and connect you with an abundance of resources. Many support groups meet in the local hospitals, libraries, and churches. If you're having difficulty finding the right support group for your situation, seek advice during your loved one's next doctor's appointment.

### **Ask For and Accept Help**

Most of us have a difficult time asking for help. Our American culture promotes individualism and we are not used to reaching out for help. For the family caregiver, asking for help and accepting help can be the difference between feeling burnt out and feeling calm. Realize that as a family caregiver, you cannot care for your loved one and yourself without help. You may be able to manage for a brief period, but eventually, you'll burn out and do more harm to your own health. Whether you ask other family members to help or hire in-home care to give yourself a break, ask for and accept help whenever you can.

### **Set Realistic Goals**

Make it a goal to take care of yourself. Imagine what you would like your life to look like in three or six months, and set realistic goals to achieve your vision. Part of taking care of yourself is setting goals that help put yourself and your health first. So, whether you envision having more help to care for your loved one in the next three to six months, having a night out once a week with friends, or carving out time to exercise, write down your goals so that you are more committed to achieving them.

## Set Healthy Boundaries

Caring for an aging loved one only gets more and more difficult as their health declines. Perhaps you assumed the role as the family caregiver without much of a discussion with your other family members, and now they've come to expect you to be the full-time family caregiver. Perhaps you are all your aging parents have, and you feel guilty hiring outside help. To best take care of yourself, set healthy boundaries with your family and loved one. Commit to what you can do for your aging parents or loved one, and say no to other tasks that are too demanding for your personal and professional life. Then, find alternative ways to manage the other caring aspects that you cannot accomplish on your own. Whether it's enrolling your aging parents in Meals on Wheels so that you don't have to cook for them, asking your siblings to take care of the laundry, or bringing in outside help to provide bathing assistance, there are other options that can help you maintain healthy boundaries.

## Take Time Off

Finally, give yourself permission to take time away from caring for your loved one. Everyone deserves a vacation from time to time. Time away allows the caregiver to recharge and can help strengthen the relationship the family caregiver has with their aging loved one. Schedule a week off from your caregiving responsibilities. Arrange for other siblings, family members, friends, or an in-home care agency to take over for you while you step away. You don't necessarily have to travel; use the time away to revisit your favorite hobbies, catch up with friends, or treat yourself to your favorite restaurant. Then, schedule consistent "me-time" for yourself so that you prevent caregiver burnout in the future.

[Visiting Angels of Boulder County](#) understands the demands of caring for an aging loved one. You do not have to navigate this care journey alone. Whether you are looking for consistent in-home care to help alleviate some of the caregiving burden you shoulder, or [need a week away to recharge](#), our Angel companions are equipped to step in where help is needed. When you choose Visiting Angels for at home care, we'll work with you to create a plan for care that addresses your loved one's individual needs. [Give us a call](#) to set up a consultation.

Visiting Angels of Denver and Boulder County, CO

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