



Taking Care of an Aging Parent

How to Cope

Are you a member of the “sandwich” generation? You are if you are caring for young children as well as one or more aging parents. Today, 44 percent of Americans between the ages of 45 and 55 have both living parents and children under 21 years old. Nearly two-thirds of primary caregivers are women. Most of these caregivers are also either working full or part-time.

Taking care of children, performing on the job and keeping up with the household chores are just some of life’s daily stresses. When you also take care of an aging parent or relative, you can feel stretched beyond your limits. Use the tips provided below to help you cope.

- Be organized. Make a list of things that need to be done, and set realistic priorities and goals. Have a backup plan in place.
- Stay healthy. Get enough sleep, eat a healthful diet and exercise regularly. Don’t overlook their own health when taking care of others.
- Make time to do things you enjoy. Relax with family and friends. Having fun, laughing and focusing on things other than your own problems helps you keep

your emotional balance and makes you a much better caregiver.

- Ask for help when you need it. There will be times when you can’t do everything that needs to be done, so call on friends and family members for help with different tasks.
- Use community resources, such as adult day services, meal or shopping services, and caregiver support groups to help lighten your load. Also look to see what programs are offered through your place of worship.
- Feel stressed, angry or depressed? Step away from the situation for a while. Leave the room for a minute or take a walk around the block.
- Do not drink excessively or use drugs to cope with the stress. If the feelings continue, talk to a trusted friend, relative, clergy or health professional. Ask your employer if there is an employee assistance program you can use.
- Talk to your supervisor at work about your care giving responsibilities, so he or she knows what difficulties you may experience. Offer to make up any work time you take off for care giving.
- Take advantage of flextime policies at work. Consider working part time or job sharing.
- Ask your human resources department for information on the Family and Medical Leave Act. This allows up to 12 weeks a year unpaid leave for family caregivers who meet certain requirements.
- Always thank your coworkers, friends and family for their support. Offer to help them with heavy family responsibilities.

Tips for Improving the Mental Health of Older Adults

Maintaining mental wellness, enlisting the help of others when you need it and surrounding yourself with a supportive, healthy environment are essential in today’s modern, on-the-go world. Spending time with family and loved ones, engaging in new activities and

volunteering are just a few of the ways you can relieve stress and cope with everyday life. Tips to follow:

- **Get plenty of rest** – Take frequent naps. Not only will they help calm your mind, but they can give you more energy. Make certain to devote a full seven to eight hours of sleep each night to sustain a proper balance of physical and mental health.
- **Go for a walk** – Enjoying a long walk at a moderate pace allows you to reflect on your day while getting the blood flowing. For an added spin, invite family members and friends to join you for an evening stroll. During bad weather, complete laps inside a local mall or community center.
- **Eat something new** - Cooking is a great way to eat well and have fun in the process. Invite family and friends to join you once a week for dinner and take turns preparing meals. Kick off special events with a potluck dinner or host an evening filled with international cuisine.
- **Exercise your mind** - Challenge yourself with a jigsaw puzzle, solve riddles, or read a good book.
- **Spend time with others** – Spending time with family and friends is important. Reach out to someone you haven't talked to a while and create new memories. Doing things together is a great way to raise your spirits and engage those around you in your life.
- **Stay in** – Don't feel obligated to do everything asked of you. It is okay to say no. To avoid feeling overwhelmed, opt to spend time with yourself once in a while. Watch a movie, paint a personal masterpiece or organize a prized collection of keepsakes.
- **Make the most of leisure time** - Make plans with family members, loved ones and/or a tour group to visit a place you've always wanted to go. Join a club, start a new hobby or learn a new skill such as gardening, bird watching or dancing. Whatever you

choose to do, make sure it's something that you truly want to do!

- **Get involved** – Volunteering is a great way to give back. Knowing that you have helped someone else can help you to feel better about yourself. Plus, sharing your time with others is a great way to get out and meet new people, with common goals and interests.
- **Take things one at a time** – Having too much on your plate can be counter-productive. Try making a list. If possible, break large tasks into smaller, more manageable items that can easily be finished. Completing one thing at a time can lead to a greater sense of accomplishment and spur you to do even more!

For More Information:

Contact the Mental Health Association of East Tennessee at 865-584-9125.

The Mental Health Association offers equally all services to eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin or disability.

