

# Caring for Elders – and Ourselves

*As the baby boomer population ages, more Americans are becoming caregivers. This responsibility can take its toll. Follow these reminders for the sake of your, and your loved one's, health and well-being.*

- 1. Ask family members for help.** Include them in decision-making. Let them know how you appreciate their help and that you cannot do it all.
- 2. Share the tasks.** Make a list of weekly tasks, and share it with your family. You don't have to do everything.
- 3. Stay involved.** Make time for social activities and friends, even if it's only a phone call or coffee date.
- 4. Join a caregiver support group.** Learning about the worries and concerns of other caregivers is useful, and you may have the chance to help others.
- 5. Find respite care.** Check with the medical staff where your mother has appointments.
- 6. Research caregiver resources in your community.** Hospitals, churches, and other groups may provide transportation or other services that support caregiving tasks. You can reduce exhaustion by planning ahead and knowing where to call for help.

## CAREGIVERS DO'S AND DON'TS

- DON'T** skip your own medical check-ups. Be sure to put your own health first by scheduling and attending them.
- DO** get regular exercise and stay physically fit. Even a 10-minute walk can relieve stress.
- DON'T** abuse alcohol and drugs.
- DO** eat healthy foods, and get enough sleep.
- DO** pursue your own interests. Spend social time with family and friends.
- DO** seek support from family, friends, professionals and your faith. Join a peer support group.
- DON'T** go it alone. Make use of appropriate in-home and community-based services.
- DO** take a breath. Try stress reduction techniques like deep breathing and meditation.



## SIGNS OF CAREGIVER STRESS

As a caregiver, you may be so focused on your loved one that you don't realize that your own health and well-being are suffering. Watch for these signs of caregiver stress:

- Feeling overwhelmed or constantly worried
- Feeling tired most of the time
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Gaining or losing a lot of weight
- Becoming easily irritated or angry
- Losing interest in activities you used to enjoy
- Feeling sad
- Having frequent headaches, pain or other physical issues

## CAREGIVING RESOURCES

**Groups providing advice on caregiving include:** AARP, Alzheimer's Association, Eldercare Locator, Family Caregiver Alliance, Medicare, National Center for Assisted Living, National Hospice and Palliative Care Center, and the National Resource Center on Supportive Housing and Home Modification. **Wealthy.com** has information on finding/completing the necessary legal documents, dealing with insurance providers, managing medications and developing a suitable care plan for your patient.

*If your caregiving responsibilities are affecting your well-being, The Village Employee Assistance Program can help. Call us at 800-627-8220.*