

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Elder Care: Sources of Stress and How to Cope

Today there are millions of people over the ages of 65 relying on relatives for their day-to-day needs. The number of elders will continue to climb even higher over the next 30 years, as medical advances continue to turn previously fatal illnesses into survivable but often chronic conditions.

Add the demands of caring for an elder relative to the challenges of a busy career and raising children, and it's no surprise that many of us have to rearrange our lives, priorities and financial resources. In short, a great deal of flexibility is required from everyone in the family, but especially from the primary caregiver.

Common challenges

Some of the common sources of stress that caregivers of elders tend to experience include:

- The need to respond to sudden crises
- Trying to care for a relative who lives in a different community
- Finding the time and energy to care or arrange for care
- Trying to find a balance between helping your loved one and letting him or her retain their independence
- Increased expenses
- Making decisions involving your relative's care, medical treatment, finances and living arrangements
- An increased potential for family conflicts
- Competing demands of work, family, elder relatives and outside interests
- Coming to terms with your loved one's declining health
- Conflicting emotions—wanting to help but resenting the time

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Ways to reduce stress

If you are feeling overwhelmed by the stress associated with caring for an elder relative, here are some suggested coping techniques:

- Become as informed as possible about your loved one's condition and about the available support.
- Learn how others have coped—join a support group.
- Share the responsibilities with family and friends.
- Seek out community agencies that provide services for seniors such as housekeeping, meals, transportation, friendly visiting, recreational activities and respite care.
- Relieve as much financial pressure as possible by ensuring your loved one is receiving all the financial benefits to which he or she is entitled.
- Investigate no-cost services.
- Reduce uncertainty about the future by making long-term plans.
- Eat well, exercise and make time for yourself.

When caring for an elder relative, this new role can create a whole slew of new responsibilities, tasks—and stress. Consider the coping techniques outlined in this article to give yourself peace of mind. And above all, don’t be afraid to reach out to friends and family for help.