

In-Home Caregivers

With modern medicine we are able to live longer—although not always healthier—lives. Longevity has also led to an increase in care giving responsibilities for many families. As your loved ones become ill or frail, they may require assistance and supervision. Unfortunately, we often feel we have to do everything alone. Asking for help is the most important thing a family member can do. Whether you ask for help from your family, friends, or pay a caregiver, this could save your emotional and physical health.



THEY MAY BE THE IDEAL SOLUTION FOR OLDER FAMILY MEMBERS AND THE ADULT CHILDREN WATCHING OUT FOR THEM

By Estee Bienstock, RN

Twenty-five percent of the population in the United States is currently dealing with care giving issues, with 80-85 percent providing the care themselves. These are people who are in their late 70s and 80s taking care of someone in their household, as well as adult children trying to maintain their own households while helping parents and family members live at home as long as possible. The adult children caring for parents have been called “The Sandwich Generation,” because they are sandwiched between aging family members on one side and young children on the other.

Often family caregivers put themselves at risk by ignoring or denying their own health issues as they take care of aging loved ones. Physical signs of stress for caregivers include disturbed sleep, body aches due to tension, headaches, digestive problems, high blood pressure, irregular heart beat, chest pains, weight fluctuation (gain or loss), fatigue, sexual dysfunction, and more. Emotional signs of stress include anxiety, depression, mood swings, frustration and irritability, memory problems, lack of concentration, increased substance abuse, feeling out of control, and a feeling of isolation.

You're not alone

Getting help is vital during this time. Caregiving does not have to be all or nothing. Having respite so one can go to work, go to the market, go out with a friend or even take a nap is important. Starting out with a few hours of help per week may be the answer.

When interviewing for an in-home caregiver, contact at least three care giving agencies or private care givers. Ask each

the same questions so you can compare answers. Be aware that the first person who comes into your home may not work out. Do not get discouraged. It sometimes takes a few tries to find the right fit. Make a list of the needs of your loved one—meal preparation, personal hygiene, personal safety, medication reminders, transportation, etc. Create a job description. Put together a routine that will make your family member as comfortable with the caregiver as possible. Spend time with the caregiver, orienting him or her to the home and surroundings. Tell them the likes and dislikes of their new client. Work with the caregiver to plan activities that allow your loved one to keep active throughout the day.

Professional help

By using a home care agency you alleviate many pitfalls. An agency can substitute with another caregiver should your caregiver have an emergency. Please note, when you hire a caregiver, it is considered custodial care. This type of care is not paid by Medicare. Long Term Care Insurance often helps pay for these services. Check the policy carefully before hiring anyone. Some policies mandate a Licensed Home Health Agency before they pay for the care. Some policies have a waiting period. These are questions that can be answered by your agent.

We are all looking for “quality of life.” Taking care of yourself and finding good care for your loved ones makes the aging process better for all.

Estee Bienstock, RN, is executive director for ALLPOINT Home Health; estee@allpointhomehealth.com.