



**Comfort
Keepers®**

a *sodexo* brand



Caring for You, Caring for Others

Facing Challenges as a Family Caregiver



What You'll Find in This Guide

Learn useful information and insights to help you and your senior loved one navigate the challenges of caregiving.



JUMP TO A MOMENT

Click on a category to the right to go directly to that section. Or, navigate sections by clicking on the arrows at the bottom of the page.



REACH OUT

Need to talk? Contact us with any of your questions; we can't wait to help you.

44.6

Average hours per week a spouse/partner spends caring for their loved one.

- AARP



Caring for You, Caring for Others

Caring for someone you love can be a fulfilling experience that brings your family closer together. However, it isn't healthy to ignore the feelings of loss, stress, and physical strain that accompany this kind of family caregiving. We've created this informational resource guide to help you stay emotionally and physically healthy while you care for your senior loved one. It's a great joy to care for others. This guide can help you care for yourself and become attuned to your own needs and feelings.

75%

*of caregivers
are female.*

- INSTITUTE ON AGING

READ:

[The Value of
Respite Care](#)

WATCH:

[The Evolution
of Senior Care](#)





What You Need to Know

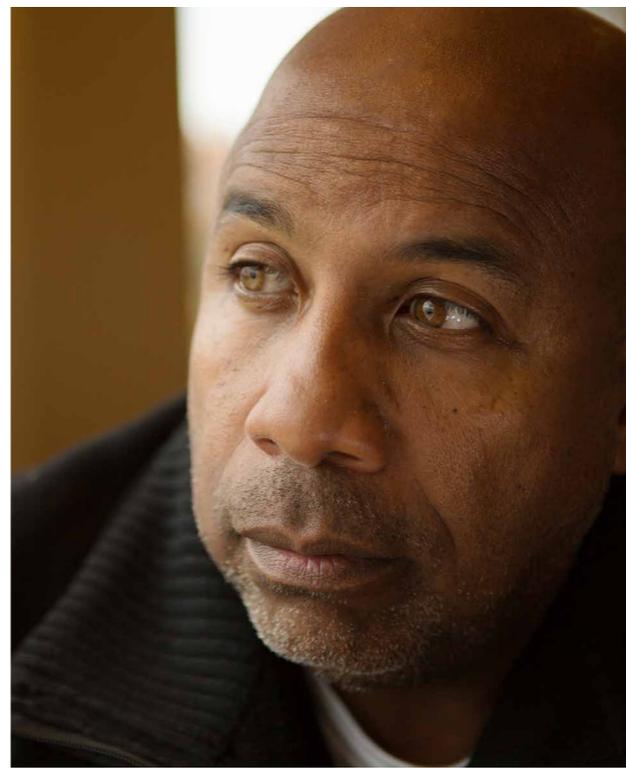
Resources to Help You
Prepare and Plan



53%

of caregivers report higher levels of emotional stress if they feel they had no choice in taking on the caregiving role.

- AARP & NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON CAREGIVING



Understanding Compassion Fatigue

What is Compassion Fatigue?

Care and empathy have no limit; we can accomplish amazing things when love is our motivation. But caregivers can't perform Herculean feats of care without also caring for themselves. In fact, it's easy, and quite common, for family caregivers to fall into chronic stress and experience unpleasant feelings concerning the care they're giving. This feeling is called compassion fatigue, and it stems from overexerting your mental, physical, and emotional capacity for others without recentering and recharging yourself in between.

Researching the Heart of Caregiving

Comfort Keepers® and the Stanford Center on Longevity surveyed adults who care for an ailing relative to understand the emotional health and social needs of family caregivers. [Click here](#) to read the results of this study.

WATCH:

[Help in the Home](#)

What are Common Signs of Compassion Fatigue?

Exhaustion (physical and/or emotional)

Sleep trouble

Lower threshold for sympathy or empathy

Self-isolation

Feeling dread or guilt

Feeling disconnected

Irritability, anger, or anxiety

Indecisiveness

Headaches

Trouble finding meaning in caregiving

Strife in other relationships

SOURCE: [DailyCaring.com](#)

Understanding Compassion Fatigue

Why is Compassion Fatigue Dangerous?

When you feel compassion fatigue, it can strain your relationships, break down communication, and provoke resentment toward yourself and the people you care about. Compassion fatigue is like an infection; it won't go away without proper treatment.

How to Cope with Compassion Fatigue

Imagine holding a five pound dumbbell. The dumbbell is not very heavy at first; you can carry it with ease. Now, imagine that you've held that dumbbell for a long time--you can feel the strain in your arm, and the weight of it has become uncomfortable. In some ways, this represents the negative effects of caring for others without taking breaks to care for yourself. To be strong and healthy, you have to learn to put down the weight of your caregiving from time to time. [This article](#) from DailyCaring outlines eight ways to safeguard your emotional and physical health to keep compassion fatigue at bay.

Counteracting Compassion Fatigue

1. Be aware of changes in your level of compassion fatigue
2. Make self-care a priority
3. Spend time with friends
4. Join a support group
5. Write in a journal
6. Use positive ways to cope with stress
7. Spend time on your hobbies
8. Speak with a counselor or therapist



READ:
[Ease the Burden of Caregiving](#)

Peace of Mind in Being Prepared

As a caregiver, juggling the health and needs of your loved one can be daunting. By making efforts to organize in advance, you and your loved one can stay on the same page and ease the stress that decision-making and preparation can cause. Planning in advance with your loved one means that his or her preferences are considered. This way, your loved one feels heard in circumstances of finances, physician visits, loss of driving privileges, and preventing home incidents.

Physician Visits

“Do you have any questions?”

It can be difficult to think of questions to ask on the spot; often, people underutilize the chance to ask questions of their physicians. If you’re accompanying your loved one to a doctor’s appointment, or even if she or he is going alone, it’s beneficial to prepare questions for the doctor in advance. In our [Quality of Life guide](#), we created a [list of questions](#) to help you get started.

Home Incidents

Many family caregivers worry about their senior loved one when she or he is home alone. People over 65 have a significant chance of hurting themselves in a fall or other home incident. You can help your loved one make his or her home a safe and accessible space by making sure that there is ample walking space between furniture and good lighting throughout the home. You can also identify and fix tripping hazards like rugs, loose carpet, or uneven ground.



READ:

[How to Be a Health Advocate](#)

WATCH:

[Designing Spaces: Aging in Place](#)

READ:

[The Difficult Driving Conversation](#)



Peace of Mind in Being Prepared

Loss of Driving Privileges

In our [Quality of Life guide](#), we talked about the challenges that come with the loss of driving privileges. We discussed common signs that driving may no longer be a safe option, and how to initiate that conversation with your loved one.

Another consideration when your loved one has given up his or her car keys is physical mobility. As seniors age, it can become more difficult to get in and out of a vehicle safely and quickly. Fortunately, there are inexpensive tools that can help. For example, you could consider a swivel seat cushion or a seatbelt extender if your senior deals with limited shoulder or torso mobility.

READ:

[Tools That Make Car Travel Easier](#)





Becoming a Better Caregiver

What Is Respite Care?

For family caregivers, accepting help is a necessity. Even with a strong support system in place, there are times when caregivers take on too much responsibility to avoid placing a burden on those around them. Many caregivers aren't aware that in-home care and adult care centers offer respite care to families in this situation. When you accept help and give yourself a break from your caregiving duties, you refresh your mind and body—and it makes you a better caregiver overall.

How Do You Get Started with Respite Care?

The goal of respite care is to give you relief from your care responsibilities. Because every family's situation is different, respite care can take many forms and durations. You can start by thinking, "How much time do I need to take so that I can take care of myself and give the best care possible?"

Once you know the amount of time that would help you, you can look for the care service to best suit your family's needs. Your local Council on Aging or the U.S. Administration on Aging's Eldercare Locator (eldercare.gov) can help you locate free or affordable options in your area. In-home care options like [Comfort Keepers](#) can facilitate a very flexible schedule for care. Whether you need a few hours of care or a full week to take a vacation, a well-trained caregiver will care for your loved one while offering safety and true companionship.

WATCH:
[An Agent for Change](#)

“The mistake many caregivers make is that they wait too long.”

– IRIS WAICHLER, AUTHOR OF *ROLE REVERSAL: HOW TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND YOUR AGING PARENTS*

[Read More from Iris Waichler](#) →

Paying for Care

Evaluating Options

Financial considerations can be one of the biggest stressors for families and caregivers when it comes to caring for a loved one. The costs of professional care—both in the home and at nursing facilities—can seem discouraging. As the responsible caregiver, there are many aspects to consider, including your own financial costs, family responsibilities, and career.

Depending on you and your senior's needs, you may only need a few hours a week of personal care or companionship from an in-home care provider. Or maybe you need the help of full-time, live-in help. When you start considering care options for your loved one, many questions tend to follow. Has your parent saved enough? Will Medicare or their insurance cover the costs? Do they need to sell assets to afford it?

Options can include Medicare, Medicaid (if you qualify), long-term care insurance, Veterans Administration benefits and out of pocket (from your savings and assets). You can find more detailed information about [each here](#).

Medicare: A common misconception is that Medicare pays the bulk of long-term care. Unfortunately, it covers only short-term, physician-prescribed home health care for skilled nursing; physical, occupational and speech therapy; medical social services; and assistance with bathing, feeding, and other personal care. It does not pay for extended care.

Medicaid and State Programs: If your senior qualifies, Medicaid will pay for nursing home care, and may cover some in-home care services. Eligibility guidelines vary by state.

Veterans Administration Aid and Attendance Pension

Benefit: Veterans and their surviving spouses may qualify for Veterans Administration (VA) benefits to cover some of the cost of in-home care. A veteran or a surviving spouse of a veteran who served at least 90 days on active duty with one day during a period of war may be eligible for the VA's non-service connected disability pension.

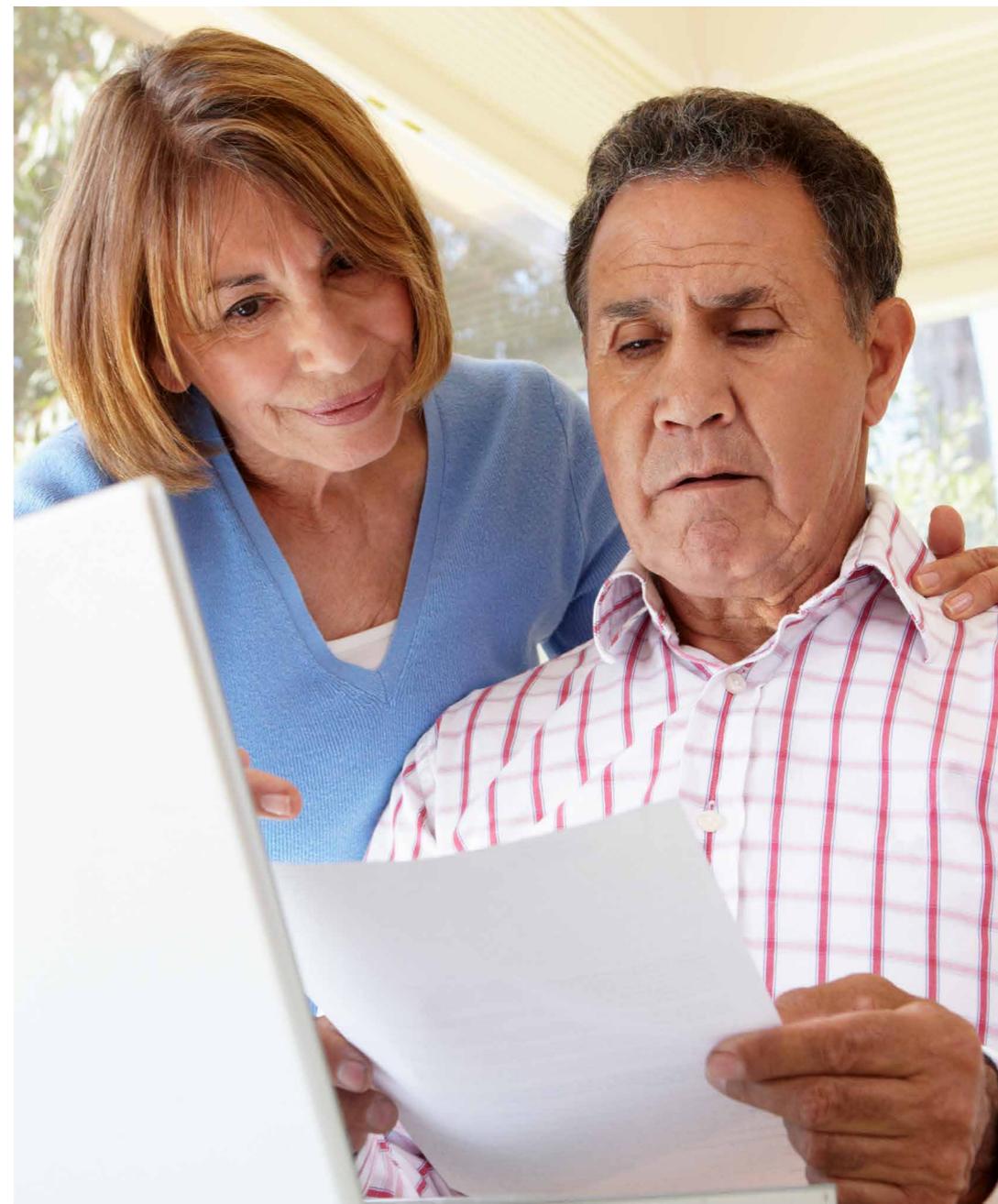


Paying for Care

Long Term Care Insurance

Long Term Care (LTC) insurance is an insurance policy that you purchase independently of other insurance policies to help cover the expenses of future long-term care. Rates for such policies can vary substantially; some factors include your age and general health. The key to saving money and preparing for care is to [be proactive](#).

We talked to a consultant who specializes in helping others prepare for future care. Her recommendation is that those in their 40s and 50s should begin to save money for future care and consider insurance options. You can start the process by setting a budget for yourself and visiting a financial advisor to talk through your saving options. [This article by AARP](#) highlights the basics of LTC insurance and can help you prepare for a meeting with a consultant or financial agent.



READ:

[Help Aging Parents with Finances](#)



“Many people buy a policy and then don’t look at it. But you should refer to it often before a time of crisis hits. Be proactive rather than reactive.”

- JESSICA THOMAS, CONSULTANT



Communication is Key

Starting Family Conversations

Keeping your family on the same page regarding your loved one's care can feel like walking a tightrope. Factors of distance, involvement, interpersonal relationships, and availability can make coordination and conversations difficult to have. But starting a family conversation is easier than you think.

Division of Caregiving Responsibilities

In a perfect world, every family member would be able to give an equal amount of time and care for their senior loved one, but issues of distance, work, and family schedules rarely make that possible. To maintain family harmony, it's important that family members:

1. Accept the amount of help that each person can give
2. Let the family member in closest proximity be the care lead
3. Be communicative and share problems when they start, not after they've built up
4. Know how to resolve issues with family openly, without talking behind backs
5. Be supportive of each other and acknowledge the strengths each person brings

READ:

[Starting the Conversation](#)

[Caring Across Long Distances](#)

Helping a Loved One with Feelings of Loss



Communicating Through Grief and Depression

Caring for a family member who's recently lost a spouse is difficult on several fronts. Supporting and caring for a grieving person while facing your own grief is dismaying and often painful. During this time, it is more important than ever to rely on those around you for emotional support. This can mean friends, other family members, support groups in your area, or counseling sessions. Give yourself time to grieve away from your loved one; this can help avoid a hardened heart when your loved one turns to you for care and emotional support.

When the grip of loss is strongest, it's important to remember that such powerful feelings are impossible to avoid. They command to be felt. While grief can be paralyzing, making efforts to focus on happy memories, plan for the future, and accepting your limits are vital to helping yourself and those you care for.



READ:

[Coping with Loss During the Holidays](#)

READ:

[How to Help Seniors Cope with Loss](#)



Being Lenient with Yourself as a Caregiver

Comfort Keepers® and the Stanford Center on Longevity produced a [collaborative research study](#) to find trends in the emotional health of the family caregiver who care for his or her loved one. The act of caregiving is foundational to human existence. We do whatever we can for the people we love most, whether we are parents or children, relatives or friends. When thinking back on life, many feel that caring for others was one of the most emotionally satisfying portions of their life.

The study found that caring for a loved one with a mild illness generally leaves older adults in the same emotional state as their peers who are not caring for a loved one – with an emotional well-being generally greater than that of younger adults. But when responsible for a loved one with a severe illness, it's a different story. The study found that their reported emotional well-being tended to be lower than those of their peers. The cause was not due to their loved one's condition, but rather the caregiver's inability to pursue their social goals and friendships.

Caring for others without also giving yourself respite and care can cause stress and anxiety. In caring for yourself, it's important to share your struggle with others. By building a strong support system to help you, you can lower your risk for depression and improve your overall health.

AARP estimates that

39.8 MILLION

Americans provided unpaid care to an adult in 2014 and 2015.

- CAREGIVING IN THE U.S., 2015 REPORT; AARP

READ:

[Finding Support When You Need it Most](#)

[Age and Emotional Well-being](#)

WATCH:

[How Caregiving Changes Your Relationship](#)

Remove the Worry From Taking a Trip



Prepare and Relax

When caring for others, it can be difficult to put your obligations out of your mind and relax. On a vacation or holiday trip, it's particularly important for caregivers to focus on themselves and take a well-deserved break. As we've said before, peace of mind comes from preparedness. Preparing for an extended time away from your senior loved one can seem intimidating, but it should never stop you from taking time for yourself.

When others step in to care for your loved one while you're gone, you want to equip them with everything they could need. Consider preparing a [Caregiver Notebook](#), which includes important information about routines, medicines, physician contact information, dietary guidelines, and legal paperwork in case of emergency.

If you are the primary caregiver for your loved one, a significant challenge can be finding someone else to fill in while you're gone. [In-home care](#) is an excellent alternative; you can be sure that your loved one's care is in professional, capable hands.



READ:

[5 Techniques to Quickly Relieve Caregiver Anxiety](#)



What's Next?

To help you create a clear path for moving forward, we've included resource links to help you research caregiving options. If you ever have questions—or just want someone to talk to—please don't hesitate to reach out. Thanks for taking the time to read our guide, and remember to look for the joy in every moment of life.

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More Resources

ABOUT COMFORT KEEPERS

Frequently Asked Questions about Home Care:

[ComfortKeepers.com](https://www.comfortkeepers.com)

The Comfort Keepers Difference:

[ComfortKeepers.com](https://www.comfortkeepers.com)

Interactive Caregiving:

[ComfortKeepers.com](https://www.comfortkeepers.com)

Advice and Guidance on Care Options:

[ComfortKeepers.com](https://www.comfortkeepers.com)

Why Comfort Keepers:

[ComfortKeepers.com](https://www.comfortkeepers.com)

Caring for the Caregiver:

[ComfortKeepers.com](https://www.comfortkeepers.com)

Quality of Life

[ComfortKeepers.com](https://www.comfortkeepers.com)

Mental Health and Well-Being

[ComfortKeepers.com](https://www.comfortkeepers.com)

FAMILY CAREGIVER RESOURCES

Understanding Long-Term Care Insurance:

[AARP.org](https://www.aarp.org)

How to Cope with Compassion Fatigue: 8 Tips for Caregivers:

[DailyCaring.com](https://www.dailycaring.com)

Info Center for Caregiver Resources:

[ComfortKeepers.com](https://www.comfortkeepers.com)

Help Aging Parents with Finances:

[DailyCaring.com](https://www.dailycaring.com)

Managing Caregiving Expectations:

[DailyCaring.com](https://www.dailycaring.com)

Elderly Home Care and Depression:

[ComfortKeepers.com](https://www.comfortkeepers.com)

The Six Stages of a Caregiver's Journey:

[ComfortKeepers.com](https://www.comfortkeepers.com)

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