

Support for Caregivers

It's easy to forget about your own needs when you're a caregiver. But doing so can take a toll on your health. Here are some caregiver support tips and tools to help you stay healthy and reduce your stress while you're caring for your mom.

- **Develop a care team:** The first tip is to develop a team of people that help out when you can't be there or need a break. Start by asking family, friends and neighbors. Even help on a small scale can be beneficial.
- **Find local resources:** Knowing what kinds of resources are available in your area, and who to contact is a priceless tool for caregivers. Depending on your mother's needs, there are lots of organizations and businesses that provide services to help, including: home health care, home and personal care services, adult daycare, companion services, home delivered meals, senior transportation and more. To help you locate what's available in your community, contact your Area Agency on Aging. Call the Eldercare Locator at 800-677-1116 to get your local agency phone number or visit www.eldercare.gov.
- **Use respite care:** This is a great service that offers caregivers some much need time off. Respite care can be for a few hours, a few days or for several weeks and can be provided in the home of the person being cared for, in an adult day center, or at a residential setting such as an assisted living facility or nursing home. To locate a respite service in your area, visit the National Respite Locator Service at www.respitelocator.org or check with your local aging agency.
- **Seek professional help:** If you're not sure what to do for your mom, or for those who are caring for an aging parent or other family member who lives in another city or state (see www.cfad.org), consider hiring a geriatric care manager (visit www.caremanager.org to locate one in your area). This is a professional who can assess your loved one's needs, and work with you to facilitate their care. The cost is around \$300 for the initial consultation and \$75 to \$150 an hour thereafter.
- **Check into health specific support:** Associations that focus on particular illnesses (such as the American Heart Association www.americanheart.org, 800-242-8721; American Cancer Society www.cancer.org, 800-227-2345; or the Alzheimer's Association www.alz.org, 800-272-3900) can be another superb resource for caregiving support and information.
- **Look for financial assistance:** If your mom could use some financial help visit www.benefitscheckup.org. This is a comprehensive resource for locating financial assistance programs that may help her pay for medications, health care, utilities and other expenses.
- **Understand insurance issues:** If you have questions about Medicare, Medicaid or long-term care, your State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) is a wonderful resource that provides free counseling on all these issues. See www.shiptalk.org to locate you local SHIP office.
- **Take care of yourself:** Last but not least make your own health a top priority. Being a caregiver is a big job that can cause emotional and physical stress and lead to illness and depression. The

only way you can provide the caregiving your mother needs is to make sure you stay healthy.

Savvy Tips: There are some great resources on the Web that can help including the Family Caregiver Alliance (www.caregiver.org), which provides contact information on all caregiver support services and programs nationwide. Also see www.caring.com, www.agis.com and www.familycaregiving101.org.

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