

FAMILY CAREGIVER SUPPORT GUIDE

Practical support for families caring for aging parents, spouses, relatives, and loved ones.

Caregiving is an act of love — but no one should have to carry it alone.

This guide helps families organize care, communicate clearly, prepare for changing needs, and protect the wellbeing of both the person receiving care and the caregiver.

HEALTH THERAPIES LIFESTYLE

Building Healthier Lives, Stronger Families, and Lasting Legacies.

Educational resource • Keep this guide with your family care information and review it whenever circumstances change.

1. Start With the Whole Person

Good caregiving begins by understanding the person, not simply the tasks. Talk openly about what matters to your loved one: independence, comfort, routines, culture, faith or personal values, social connection, privacy, and the kind of help they are comfortable receiving.

- What can they still do safely and independently?
- Where are they beginning to need assistance?
- What routines give them comfort and dignity?
- Who do they want involved in decisions?
- What are their priorities if their needs increase?

2. Build a Family Care Team

Care becomes more sustainable when responsibilities are shared. One person may coordinate appointments while another handles groceries, transportation, finances, companionship, or regular check-in calls.

- Choose one primary family coordinator.
- List relatives, friends, neighbors, faith/community contacts, and professional helpers.
- Assign specific responsibilities rather than saying “help when you can.”
- Create a shared calendar or communication method.
- Identify a backup person for essential responsibilities.

3. Organize Medical Information

Keep an up-to-date care record that can travel with your loved one to appointments or emergencies. Never rely on memory alone when several medications, clinicians, or conditions are involved.

- Primary doctor and specialists with phone numbers
- Current medications, doses, schedules, allergies, and supplements
- Medical conditions and relevant history
- Pharmacy and insurance information
- Recent hospitalizations, procedures, and test results
- Emergency contacts and preferred hospital

4. Prepare for Medical Appointments

Before an appointment, write down the most important questions and any changes you have noticed. Describe what is happening, when it began, how often it occurs, and whether it is getting better or worse.

- Bring the current medication list.
- Take notes or ask permission to record key instructions.
- Ask what symptoms require an urgent call or emergency care.
- Confirm medication changes and follow-up appointments.
- Ask what changes the family should watch for at home.

5. Medication Safety

Medication routines can become complicated quickly. Use one current medication list and update it whenever a clinician makes a change. A pharmacist can also help identify duplication, interactions, or confusing schedules.

- Use a pill organizer or other reliable reminder system when appropriate.
- Do not stop, double, or alter prescription doses without appropriate medical guidance.
- Record medication changes immediately.
- Keep medicines stored safely and according to instructions.
- Dispose of discontinued or expired medicines appropriately.

6. Make the Home Safer

Small changes can reduce falls and make everyday life easier. Walk through the home from the perspective of someone with reduced strength, balance, vision, hearing, or mobility.

- Remove loose rugs and clutter from walking paths.
- Improve lighting, especially stairs, hallways, and bathrooms.
- Consider grab bars, handrails, non-slip surfaces, and suitable seating.
- Keep frequently used items within easy reach.
- Check that mobility aids are correctly fitted and used.
- Keep emergency numbers accessible.

7. Nutrition, Hydration & Daily Routine

Changes in appetite, swallowing, dental health, mobility, medication, mood, or cognition can affect eating and drinking. Regular meals, hydration, movement, daylight, conversation, and sleep routines can support overall wellbeing.

- Notice unexplained weight loss or rapid weight gain.
- Watch for difficulty chewing or swallowing.
- Keep water and appropriate drinks accessible.
- Encourage nourishing foods that fit medical and dietary guidance.
- Discuss significant appetite or weight changes with the healthcare team.

8. Communication, Memory & Changing Abilities

If memory, judgment, hearing, speech, or orientation begins to change, communication may need to change too. Speak clearly, allow time for responses, reduce unnecessary distractions, and avoid arguing over minor errors.

- Use calendars, labels, written reminders, and consistent routines.
- Watch for sudden confusion — especially when accompanied by illness or medication changes.
- Include the person in decisions as much as possible.
- Ask clinicians about new or worsening cognitive or behavioral changes.

9. Protect the Caregiver

Caregiver exhaustion can affect judgment, health, patience, and the ability to continue providing care. Rest and support are part of responsible caregiving, not an indulgence.

- Schedule regular time away from caregiving duties.
- Accept specific offers of help.
- Maintain your own medical appointments, sleep, meals, and movement.
- Talk with trusted family, friends, support groups, or professionals.
- Recognize when the level of care needed is more than one person can safely provide.

10. Plan Before a Crisis

Families make better decisions when important conversations happen before an emergency. Planning may include finances, insurance, legal documents, housing preferences, transportation, caregiving responsibilities, and wishes for future medical care.

- Know where essential documents are stored.
- Identify who is authorized to help with healthcare and financial decisions.
- Discuss preferred living arrangements if independent living becomes difficult.
- Review emergency and end-of-life preferences with appropriate professionals.
- Revisit the plan as circumstances change.

FAMILY CARE PLAN

Use this page to create a simple snapshot of the current care arrangement.

Person receiving care	_____
Primary family coordinator	_____
Primary doctor	_____
Preferred pharmacy	_____
Emergency contact	_____
Main caregiving priorities	_____ _____
Current concerns / changes	_____ _____
Next medical appointment	_____
Family member responsible	_____
Plan review date	_____

WHEN TO SEEK URGENT HELP

Call emergency services for immediately life-threatening symptoms. Examples can include severe difficulty breathing, chest pain, signs of stroke, loss of consciousness, uncontrolled bleeding, or another sudden severe medical emergency. For new or worsening symptoms that are not immediately life-threatening, contact the appropriate healthcare professional promptly.

A NOTE FROM HEALTH THERAPIES LIFESTYLE

Strong families are built not only by preparing for the future, but by caring for one another through every season of life. Asking for help, sharing responsibility, and planning ahead can protect dignity, relationships, and wellbeing for the entire family.

Important: This guide is for general education and family organization. It does not diagnose, treat, or replace advice from physicians, nurses, pharmacists, attorneys, financial professionals, emergency services, or other qualified professionals.