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Caregiver day 2015

Getty Images Taking care of someone you love is challenging. Here are some tips to make it a little easier. Credit: Getty Images Each year, an estimated 43.5 million adults in the U.S.—about 60% of them women—act as caregivers somehow to a loved one. Half the time they take care of one of their relatives, and most often it's an aging parent or parent in law. It is a responsibility that will not always be easy, but it can be rewarding. Really. But before you jump (or are thrown) into the situation, it helps to know what to expect. Ad Ad Credit: Getty Images First thing first: Assemble your caregiving team. That could include close relatives, family or even close friends and neighbors, said Leah Eskanzi, a spokesperson for the Family Caregiver Alliance. Anyone who can help with that responsibility should be invited to this initial interview, including your foster carer, provided they are physically or mentally able to attend. This is especially important if the person is in the very early stages of a disease like dementia, says Eskanzi. You want to involve them in any kind of property planning while they can still make decisions. You can also call a third-party broker or social worker to help run the conversation, especially if you think there may be any inconsistencies, she says. Credit: Getty Images Unfortunately, it's something that many families avoid until it's too late. The most important thing I've learned with family carers is that no one really has plans, Eskanzi says. We are such an independent society and we don't want to think about our loved ones getting a debilitating disease. Eskanzi's organization provides tons of caregiver resources to people who are just getting started, including this super-useful Where to Find My Important Papers checklist, which can help families gather (and find) all the documents they will need to take care of their relative. RELATED: 5 Ways to Deal With Caregiver Stress Ad Credit: Getty Images When a Family Member Falls Ill, The Responsibility for Caring Usually Falls to the Adult Daughter, says Lisa Fredman, Ph.D., an epidemiologist at Boston University who has researched this topic. And since women often end up taking on the caring duties, their income and career may suffer. One study found that around 60% of carers have to adapt their work plan around their new responsibilities, either by cutting their working hours, taking leave or more. You may not want to accept money to take care of a relative, but if you do, consider creating what is called a personal caregiver's appointment. It does not need to be prepared by a lawyer, but this contract must be in writing and should include a detailed description of your expected tasks and payments. You may need the money: the study found that the average cost of caregiving is \$5,531 a year. Yes, a contract may sound clinical, but it can also save your family from some inevitable struggles in the future, and it can be worth a lot more than money. RELATED: How to be a Caregiver and not go broke you Credit: Getty Images You may not be able to do it all. And that's okay. - Relatives often feel guilty that they are not doing enough, says Eskanzi. They have an idealized picture of what [the job] entails. This is where some in-home help can make all the difference. Whether you're recruiting an assistant from an agency or hiring a private employee, it's helpful to make a list of tasks you'd like to delegate. (If possible, your relative should have an influence on this as well.) About 40% of caregivers say that dealing with incontinence or diapers is one of their most difficult tasks; about 30% of them say helping their relative shower and use the bathroom is tough as well. Would you prefer if a non-family member tackled bathing and dressing? Or if a professional managed all the medications and doctors appointments? A little strategic help can make the whole experience seem easier. Credit: Getty Images This is the topic no one wants to talk about. However, if you are the primary caregiver, especially of someone suffering from a disease that causes memory loss, you can look at a document called power of attorney. (And yes, it's as serious as it sounds.) It is a legal authority that can allow you to make financial decisions on behalf of your loved one. The laws of power of attorney vary from state to state, so it may be a good idea to consult a senior lawyer - find one here - to prepare all documents. In addition, you should discuss advance directives, including a living will that clarifies what type of care your loved one wants at the end of life, and a health care authorization that allows you to make health care decisions too. Ad Credit: Getty Images Credit: Getty Images About 1 in 3 caregivers do not receive any help, either from paid workers or unpaid volunteers. But you will be surprised how many good Samaritans are willing to lend a hand with. Churches, synagogues or schools often offer meals for the elderly, and Meals on Wheels will deliver food to your door. Another resource is Eldercare Locator, which connects elderly people and their caregivers with local aging organizations; it's one of the best resources caregivers can have, says Cindi Hounsell, president of Wiser Women, a nonprofit organization that helps women plan for retirement. Credit: Getty Images On average, relatives have been helping their loved ones for 4 years. (And about 1 in 4 of them have been in this role for 5 or more years.) At the beginning, you think on yourself as just helping, says Eskanzi. However, as the disease progresses, continue to grow. Not only that, but new health problems can turn up unexpectedly. Nearly 40% of all people receiving care have more than one disease or health problem. You won't be able to predict everything the future brings, says Fredman. But you can ask for help and give yourself the occasional break. Ad Credit: Getty Images They are normal. It's common for relatives to feel conflicting emotions, says Fredman, who points out that while these feelings can vary positively to the negative, it's the latter that really makes people feel guilty. When you start taking care of a parent or relative, it is possible for anger, frustration and anger to creep in. All perfectly understandable. Consider some facts: About 50% of all caregivers feel as if they were forced into their role, 38% say they are emotionally stressed, and about 40% perform medical or nursing tasks without ever being trained, according to a 2015 survey. It's a lot of pressure. So forgive yourself for the times you lose your temper (and know that you're not alone). RELATED: Best and worst ways to cope with Stress Credit: Getty Images It can be hard enough dealing with a brother or sister under normal circumstances—throwing into the long-term care of a parent, and things can get ugly, quickly. The experience can bring up unresolved problems, Eskanzi says. And that caregiving can reflect the family dynamics. In other words, if you were the oldest or responsible sibling, your brothers or sisters might assume that you will handle most of the logistics. On the other hand, if you're one of those younger kids, your older siblings can't think you can handle the responsibility. Not only that, says Leah, but siblings have different types of relationships with their parents, not all have been treated equally. Communication is key, but keep it healthy — don't try to owe anyone or assume you know how they feel. Credit: Getty Images It sounds theatrical, right? But it's actually one of the most important things you want to do for the person you care about. Think about it: If you're healthy, you'll have more energy, strength and a stronger immune system, says Laura Rice-Oeschger, LMSW, a wellness coordinator at the University of Michigan. The problem is, it's hard to pay attention to yourself when you're so focused on someone else. The guilt factor also enters our consciousness: we equate self-care with self-indulgence, she says. Caregivers experience more stress and are more susceptible to panic and anxiety than their non-caring counterparts, according to a 2014 study from the UK. You have to be proactive. Mindfulness can help - research has shown that carers who practiced this stress reduction technique were able to lower their anxiety levels by the end of Study. Take 30-second breaks day and pay attention to all your senses, your posture, and your breathing, says Rice-Oeschger. Watch the video: A Meditation to De-Stress Advertising Credit: Getty Images Taking care of a relative can displace your social life. Suddenly you find yourself spending more time at home and less time with your friends. That all adds up, which is why researchers warn that relatives find themselves isolated from others, which then increases their stress levels. But not only should you try to preserve your old friendships, you also have to try to seek out new ones, says a local relative, Rice-Oeschger says. Bonding is important for a healthy caring experience, she says. Credit: Getty Images There has been a lot of talk about the negatives of caring. But for years, researchers have known that there are also benefits to caring for a loved one, too. It's psychologically gratifying, says Fredman, whose research has shown that relatives actually live longer than non-relatives. (This could be because people who take care of another tend to be healthy in general, but it's also true that altruism and volunteering are linked to longevity too.) In fact, a study found that carers get a great deal of satisfaction from taking care of a loved one — that it actually made sense for their lives. Us.

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