

Caregiver Tips During COVID-19:

Building Resilience, Protecting Yourself and Those You Care For

Caregivers are among the most resilient, capable, and competent people in this country. At a time when many are struggling to cope with the new reality of social distancing at home, uncertain of what tomorrow brings, caregivers live in this reality on a daily basis.

One of the strengths caregivers have is resilience to take each day as it comes. As a caregiver, the skills you have accrued (and your innate compassion for others) will serve you well at this difficult time. And remember, there is strength in seeking help.

THE PROBLEM

Many older adults are canceling in-home services, and caregivers may be hesitant due to concerns about spreading COVID-19. However, caregivers can do concrete things to support older adults in need. Here are some guidelines that may be helpful:

Protect Your Health to Protect Your Loved Ones

- Take [everyday steps](#) to ensure that you reduce the odds of getting sick. As time permits, [sanitize your home as thoroughly and often as you can](#), with an [effective disinfectant](#). This is particularly important after a visitor enters your home. See the [CDC's FAQs](#) for specifics on how the virus can and cannot be transmitted.
- If you are concerned that you may be sick with COVID-19, please review these [helpful tips from the CDC](#). [Click here](#) for a self-checker.
- Even if you're feeling healthy, [wash your hands frequently](#), and ask visitors to do the same. The CDC has a 2-minute video on best hand-washing techniques. In fact, wash your hands every time you walk by a sink.
- [Social distancing is okay](#). If family members visit, but are reluctant to be close to you or to your loved one, that is perfectly normal. Normal, but not easy. *We all appreciate hugs and physical closeness from our friends and family, but this is a time to use caution.*

Maintaining Your Loved One's Access to Food and Healthcare

If you or your family employs a caregiver, continue to foster that relationship. *Unless that caregiver has been exposed to the virus, there's no reason to end their services.* However, caution and service modification are prudent.

- Ask about their recent travels/activities, and about their hand-washing practices.
- Ask them to use [personal protective equipment](#) (PPE; e.g., gloves, mask, etc.) if they have it available. This is most important for direct contact care.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Caregiver Help Desk:

855-227-3640

<https://www.caregiveraction.org>

Eldercare Locator:

800-677-1116

<https://eldercare.acl.gov/Public/Index.aspx>

Administration for Community Living:

<https://acl.gov/COVID-19>

AARP:

877-333-5885

- If allowing a necessary service provider into your home makes you feel uncomfortable for any reason, call the Caregiver Help Desk or visit their website (<https://www.caregiveraction.org>) and they will help you navigate the situation.
 - Free Caregiver Help Desk (open 8:00am-7:00pm ET) 855-227-3640
 - Chat available on website as well
- If you need help finding eldercare, resources can be found at:
 - Administration for Community Living: <https://eldercare.acl.gov/>
 - Eldercare Finder Toll-Free Number: 800-677-1116
- Utilize grocery and meal delivery services. Consider these [helpful tips](#) about how to make these services a part of your routine.

The Importance of Self-Care for Caregivers

Stress can [decrease your immunity](#) and use up emotional resources, both of which are critical to protect during this time of uncertainty. These are challenging circumstances and you are doing the best possible job you can for yourself and your loved one. The CDC offers [suggestions to reduce stress and maintain wellness](#) during this precarious time.

- First and foremost, take care of yourself and prioritize your own well-being.
- Take a deep breath and know you will get through this. If you become overly anxious or depressed, it may impact your ability to care for your loved one. Take care of your own emotional health.
- Engage in daily physical activity, prayer, or meditation.

Sometimes caregivers feel guilty when they take time for themselves—this is normal when you’re caring for someone you love.

- It’s important to *take the time daily to seek out the little things that bring you joy ...* maybe savoring a morning cup of coffee, or listening to the birds sing as they greet the day. Allow yourself these joyful moments.
- If you live with someone, let them know when you need respite care. Caregiving is 24/7 challenging work, and everyone needs a break to recharge and renew.
- Another option for support is to ask for care packages from loved ones rather than in-person visits; that may ease your stress and protect your household.
- AARP has a support line for caregivers to call during this time if you have questions or need local resources: 1-877-333-5885.
- The Family Caregiver Alliance also has [online support groups](#) to ensure that you can stay connected to other people facing similar challenges.

LOVE WINS

There are many people in your community, city, state, and country that want to help others right now. [Our country has a strong volunteer spirit, and people really want to help.](#) You will likely be receiving more calls at this time from your family, friends, and faith communities who care about you in this time of crisis. Tell them what you need. Remember the strength in seeking and accepting help. Allowing others to help you in this way is a gift to them as well.

Don’t forget to tell your loved ones, “I love you,” “I’m here for you,” and “We’ll get through this.” Look for people who will give you the same type of support that you are providing to others.

While social distancing measures can feel isolating, it can be helpful to remember: **you are not alone** in the unique challenges presented by the pandemic.

Contributors:

Connie Tomlin, M.A. Matthew Fullen, Ph.D., M.Div. Laura Shannonhouse, Ph.D.
Mary Chase Mize, M.S. Jordan Westcott, M.S. Paul Delaughter, B.S