



**Comfort  
Keepers®**

Elevating the  
Human Spirit™

# Caring for you, caring for others

Facing challenges as a family caregiver



# 44.6

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

Source: AARP

## 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, click on the arrows.

### Reach out

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



Compassion Fatigue



Being Prepared



Paying for Care



Open Communication



Caregiver Well-being



Planned Holiday



Info Center

**You can't pour from an empty cup. Take care of yourself first.**

*- Unknown*





**75% of caregivers are female.**

*Source: Institute on Aging*



## 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.

TAKEAWAY  
Read: *The Value of Respite Care*



TAKEAWAY  
Watch: *The Evolution of Senior Care*







# What you need to know

Resources to help you prepare and plan





Compassion  
Fatigue

## 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.



TAKEAWAY

Watch: [Help in the Home](#)

### What are common signs of compassionate fatigue?

Exhaustion  
(physical and/or emotional)

Lower threshold for sympathy  
or empathy

Feeling dread or guilt

Irritability, anger, or anxiety

Headaches

Sleep trouble

Self-isolation

Feeling disconnected

Indecisiveness

Trouble finding meaning  
in caregiving

Strife in other relationships

Source: [DailyCaring.com](#)

# 53%

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

Source: AARP and National Alliance on Caregiving

## Counteracting compassion fatigue

Be aware of changes in your level of compassion fatigue

Use positive ways to cope with stress

Make self-care a priority

Spend time on your hobbies

Spend time with friends

Speak with a counselor or therapist

Join a support group

Write in a journal



Compassion  
Fatigue

## 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.



TAKEAWAY

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.



Being Prepared



TAKEAWAY

Read: [How to Be a Health Advocate](#)



TAKEAWAY

Watch: [Designing Spaces: Aging in Place](#)







Being Prepared

## 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.

TAKEAWAY

Read: [Tools That Make Car Travel Easier](#)  
Read: [The Difficult Driving Conversation](#)





# 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](http://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.



### TAKEAWAY

Watch: [An Agent for Change](#)



Being Prepared



**"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

## 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

## 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.



DOWNLOAD

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





Open  
Communication



## 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

TAKEAWAY

Read: [\*Starting the Conversation\*](#)  
Read: [\*Caring Across Long Distances\*](#)





Open  
Communication

## 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.



TAKEAWAY

Read: *How to Help Seniors Cope with Loss*  
Read: *Coping with Loss During the Holidays*







Caregiver  
Well-Being

## 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 a loved one can be a joyful experience, but it's important to know when a break is needed. Taking time for respite and self-care can do wonders not only for your individual wellbeing, but also the relationship with your loved one. In caring for yourself, it's also important to share your struggle with others and build a strong support system.



AARP ESTIMATES

**39.8M** Americans provided unpaid care to an adult in 2014 and 2015

Source: *Caregiving in the U.S., 2015 Report*; AARP

TAKEAWAY

Watch: [How Caregiving Changes Your Relationship](#)



TAKEAWAY

Read: [Age and Emotional Well-being](#)  
Read: [Caregiving Is Hard Enough Isolation Can Make It Unbearable.](#)



# 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, remember that finding help while you're gone doesn't have to be difficult. In-home care, like the services provided by Comfort Keepers, can be an excellent resource. With the assistance of compassionate and empathetic caregivers, you can be sure that your loved one is receiving holistic care that lifts their spirits.



Planned  
Holiday



TAKEAWAY

Read: *5 Techniques to Quickly Relieve Caregiver Anxiety*





## More resources

### About

#### Comfort Keepers

FAQs 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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## 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.

**(866) 464-1380**  
**[ComfortKeepers.com](https://www.comfortkeepers.com)**