

**caring**  
*for those*  
**you care about**

# Providing Care at Home

**Y**our mother is recovering from a broken hip, and she is unable to keep the house clean or do her laundry. You and your sister are exhausted from providing 24-hour care for your father. You live across the country from your mother and worry that she spends too much time alone. Dad needs daily physical therapy and special medical treatments, but he can't afford a nursing home.

Situations such as these are common among adult children and older parents who have health problems. Most older people prefer to stay at home even when their needs for care are great. As a result, families take on care responsibilities, which may involve managing high-tech medical treatments, assisting with daily activities, and dealing with issues around dying.

Too often, adult children feel that with a little extra effort they can take care of everything themselves — a point of view some parents may encourage. However, caregivers who get help with tasks and relief from pressures are, in fact, less likely to burn out and better able to provide long-term support for their parents.

If you don't know what the options are or how to find information and resources, you are not alone. This tip sheet is designed to help you. It presents an

overview of the varied community services to help older people remain at home and suggests how to find and use these services to their best advantage.

## Community Services

Many community-based services that can help older parents are considered long-term care services, which can include everything from help with household chores to round-the-clock care. Help may be provided by a nurse, a trained aide, or a volunteer, and costs range from free to expensive. The following are some of the most common types of assistance:

### ■ Help with Everyday Needs

**Companionship services.** These services may include companionship, home supervision, telephone reassurance, and friendly visitors. Visits and phone calls are likely to be of minimal cost or free if provided by the local area agency on aging.

### Help around the house.

Homemakers and home care aides do chores such as laundry, cooking, errands, and shopping, and provide some help with bathing and dressing. Home repair services perform minor repairs and maintenance. These service providers generally charge an hourly rate. Check with your local aging

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office to see what services are available in your area.

**Meal programs.** Meals can be delivered to the home or eaten in group settings, such as senior centers. Check with your local aging office to see what meal programs are available in your area.

## ■ Health Care

### **In-home nurses and therapists.**

Registered Nurses (RNs) and Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) provide skilled care prescribed by physicians, such as monitoring medications and teaching recipients and their families about special care procedures. Professional therapists provide respiratory, physical, speech, and occupational therapies in the home. These services may be covered by Medicare, Medicaid, or other insurance.

**Home health aides.** These workers assist with personal care tasks such as bathing, dressing, eating and exercising. These services may be covered by Medicare, Medicaid, or other insurance.

**Hospice care.** Hospice care involves professionally coordinated support services, including pain and symptom management, social services, and emotional and spiritual support for the terminally ill and their families. The care is provided both at home and in other settings. Medicare, Medicaid, or other insurance may pay for hospice care for eligible people.

**Adult day services.** Local centers provide structured, comprehensive programs including a variety of health, social, and related support services during any part of the day, but for less than 24 hours. Costs vary dependent upon the older person's needs.

## ■ Help for Caregivers

**Caregiver support groups.** These groups provide emotional support and information sharing among people who are also caregivers.

**Geriatric care managers.** A professional who performs an assessment of a person's mental, physical, environmental, and financial conditions to create a care plan to assist in arranging housing, medical, social, and other services.

**Respite care.** These services provide temporary relief to regular caregivers from a few hours a day to several weeks. The care can be in an adult day center, a nursing home, in the home (usually for short stints), or elsewhere. Some programs are subsidized and use volunteers. Most provide companionship or supervision when care is needed for only a few hours at a time.

## ■ Linking with Community Services

Community services can make a big difference, but it takes work to find the best ones for your situation and to use them effectively. Here are some tips to get you started:

**Identify needs.** You can do this on your own, or you may want to have a geriatric care manager conduct a formal assessment, which will identify both needs and sources of assistance.

**Do research** to find out what community services are available where your parent lives. Or you may want to get help from a geriatric care manager, social worker, or hospital discharge planner. In addition, some community agencies provide relevant information and referral services.

**Compare costs** and find out what insurance will cover. While you may be able to find free or subsidized services, some may be offered only on a short-term basis. If Medicare, Medicaid, or other insurance provides coverage, find out the limits. Check with your area agency on aging, community or faith-based services, and your local department of social services for available programs.

**Check for the quality of services.** Currently, there is limited government oversight of long-term care services, so it's important for you to check the quality of services carefully.

**Strategies that can help.** Get referrals from friends and family. Interview providers personally, and involve your parent if feasible. Find out about worker education, training, and experience, and get at least two references. Find out if an agency screens and bonds employees and provides training. Visit facilities such

as adult day centers to check how clean they are, what kinds of activities are going on, and the types of people participating (physical disabilities? difficulty communicating? Alzheimer's disease?).

**Be organized.** Specialists on aging suggest developing a file system for all the agencies or services you research. Information you learn now may be useful later.

**Be sensitive to your parents' reactions,** but know your own limits. Although your parents may prefer that you or other family members provide all their care, you have the right to get help. Try to work through your parents' concerns, perhaps with the help of a geriatric care manager.

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