



ABOUT FAMILY CAREGIVERS

More than 60 million Americans are providing care for family members who, due to the infirmities of aging or impairments related to disabilities, need daily care to ensure their health, welfare and safety. Family caregivers are an often forgotten group by their families, friends and communities. Their social lives are limited because of their caregiving duties. Their marriages often end because of the stress of caring for another family member. They face financial hardship because of the economic costs of their caregiving duties. And, caregivers often suffer from depression, hypertension, diabetes, and other stress-related illnesses brought on by the stress and physical burdens of caregiving.

Caregivers, while they may not ask, need help from their families, friends and communities. Here are a few ways you can help a family member or friend who is a current caregiver:

1. Send a supportive card or letter.

This simple act can brighten a caregiver's day and remind them there are people who care for them. If you live at a distance, this is the perfect way to show you care. When sending a card or letter, refrain from making suggestions on how the caregiver might be able to do a better job. Keep your cards and letters positive and share happy news about you and your family. You may want to include a gift card so that the caregiver can treat themselves.

2. Give the caregiver a personal care pampering basket.

Create a small basket of their favorite lotions, fluffy socks, soothing music, candy, a scented candle, and bath salts. Caregivers generally do not indulge themselves and need to be reminded to do so. A caregiver pampering basket may do just that.

3. Bring a premade meal to the caregiver's home.

You can do this as a one-time act, on a regular basis, or organize a meal calendar where members of a group sign up to bring a meal over the course of a week or month. Bring the main dish plus all the fixings, including a vegetable and dessert. Include paper plates and plastic silverware so the caregiver doesn't have to clean up. Check for food allergies or diet restrictions in advance.

4. Offer to do housework.

Many household tasks are difficult to do when someone is caring for an elderly or disabled loved one. Offer to come in and do laundry, dust, clean bathrooms, vacuum, or sweep and mop. If you are unable to help due to distance or physical limitations, offer to pay a professional cleaning service to come in and help.

5. Offer to do the yard work.

Caregivers often have a difficult time allowing someone into their home to clean. Yard work can be done without intruding. It is also one of the last things a caregiver has time or ability to do — it is difficult to supervise a loved one with dementia and use a lawnmower at the same time.

6. Offer to run an errand for the caregiver.

When you go to the store, call before you leave and ask if there is anything you can pick up. You can also schedule a regular time to pick up a grocery list and bring items back. Since you are already going to the store, this allows you to assure the caregiver it is not an inconvenience — which helps ease the guilt caregivers often feel when accepting help.



7. Offer to provide some respite care.

Caregivers spend most of their day focused on the care and support of another person. They take little time for themselves. Offer to spend a couple of hours caring for their loved one so they can go to a doctor's appointment, do personal banking, get a massage, or just have a few quiet hours without the burdens of caregiving.

8. If you are a family member who lives at a distance, offer to visit for a few days and be the primary caregiver while you are there.

This will allow the caregiver time to catch up on personal business and recharge. It can also reduce family conflict and resentment that often results when one family member carries caregiving duties alone while others continue their daily lives.

9. Visit.

Caregivers often lose most of their social contacts because they have a difficult time engaging in social events. Friends and family should make an effort to regularly visit for social connection. Call before you visit to make sure it does not interfere with hands-on caregiving such as bathing or therapies. The caregiver needs your social interaction and will appreciate your patience.

10. Help them with their holiday shopping and present wrapping.

Caregivers have little time to go holiday shopping or wrap presents. Offer to shop for items on their list, then help wrap and tag presents so they are ready for gift-giving.