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Caring for Aging Parents

One day, it happens. Your mother gets lost on her routine morning walk. Or your father has a stroke and can't feed himself. You realize it's time to take care of him as he did for you over the years.

The Navajo call the journey ahead of caring for the elderly "the blessing path." While stepping into this new role can feel overwhelming, this month's Member Matters can make your journey easier.

EH

Emotional
Health

Extending the Family: When an Elder Moves Into Your Home

Many working adults are faced with the question of whether to include an aging parent or another older relative in their household. If your relationship has been strained in the past, living together may not be the best plan. For people who have had a strong, loving connection with their parent or relative, the decision may be easier.

Even if you invite an elder to join your household, there are many practical and emotional issues to consider before making the change.

SHARING YOUR HOME

Talk about your expectations, wishes and fears ahead of time.

Will the older adult have trouble adjusting to your rules?

How will the older person be included in family activities?

Will you be able to find other living arrangements for your elder if the situation is no longer working?

COMMUNICATION STYLES

Do you and your elder have a way of sorting out differences?

Does your elder's communication style mesh with the way your family resolves differences?

CARE REQUIREMENTS

How much care does your elder need?

Does he or she need help with bathing, medicine and other types of personal care?

Can other family members help?

Does your community have home health services that provide transportation, nursing or personal care for older adults?

Have you discussed long-term care arrangements?

Does your employer's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or your local commission on aging provide information?

PHYSICAL SPACE

Can your elder walk up stairs or will a room on the main floor be needed?

What arrangements can be made for added privacy?

Will someone have to give up their room?

Will you need to modify bathrooms, stairways or laundry areas for your elder's safety?

Does the older person prefer a very cool or very warm environment?

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

What household expenses will increase?

Can the older person contribute?

Will a family member need to cut back on work hours, thereby decreasing income?

Will there be financial advantages when the older person and family share expenses?

SOCIAL ACTIVITY

Once an elder moves in, plan time together and time apart.

Encourage the older adult to see friends and participate in activities at an adult day care or senior center.

Allow your elder to maintain a sense of dignity and privacy with a life of his or her own for as long as possible.

MAKING IT WORK

Your elder will benefit from the warmth of family care while your children will enjoy the perspective offered by an older adult.

Encourage the older adult to see friends and participate in activities at an adult day care or senior center.

You'll reap the satisfaction of caring for an elder in his or her later years.

Also in this Issue:



Just in Case: Planning for Caregivers

Falls, sudden medical crises and unexpected hospitalizations often come with the territory. As a caregiver, you need to prepare for such emergencies - to "plan for what you can."

CONTACT

If there is an emergency, you want the person you're concerned about to be able to call you. You may also want to set up a system where you and other family members, friends or neighbors check in regularly to be sure that everything is okay. A personal emergency response system may be helpful.

ACCESS

If the need arrives, be sure that you have access to the person you are caring for as well as to her property and vital documents:

Keep duplicate keys for home, garage, car, safe, etc.

Discuss the advisability of second signature arrangements on key bank accounts and safe deposit boxes.

Consider power of attorney.

INFORMATION

In case of emergency, keep important data at your fingertips. Maintain lists of this information at home, at work and in your purse or wallet. Here's some information you may want to keep handy:

- **LEGAL**

- Wills and Trusts

- Durable Power of Attorney for Finance

- Durable Power of Attorney for Health

- **FINANCIAL**

- Safety Deposit Box & Keys

- Check Register

- Savings Passbook

- Tax Records

- Insurance Policies

- **HEALTH PLAN AND INSURANCE**

- Primary Insurance Information

- Medicare Supplemental Insurance

- Long-Term Insurance

- Other Coverage Information

- **OTHER DOCUMENTATION**

- Burial Plan

- Deed

- Vehicle Title

MEDICATION RECORDS

Name	Purpose Dose	When to Take	Possible Side-Effects	Doctor	Pharmacy	RX#

PERSONAL INFORMATION**Name****Address:****Phone:****Social Security Number:****Date/Place of Birth:****Medicare #:****Medi-Cal #:****Military ID#:****Driver's License #:****PERSONAL CONTACTS****Family:****Doctors:****Neighbors:****Clergy:****Friends:****Pharmacy:****Hospital:****Tax Preparer:****Insurance Agent:**



Living Arrangements

The choice of living arrangements for older people is one of the most basic decisions you will have to make, and it will involve many conflicting emotions. There are basically three choices when it comes to living arrangements, and each has its own advantages and disadvantages.

HOME

The major advantage of living at home is that the elder can maintain a sense of independence, self-worth and privacy. Moreover, staying in a comfortable and familiar environment has proven to be beneficial in many cases.

The major disadvantage of staying home, however -- particularly if they are alone -- is that the elder may not be able to take care of him or herself effectively. Finances, bills, medications, meals, bathing and housekeeping chores can be difficult to keep up with. Another issue is safety, including a lack of support railings, steep stairs, crime, etc.

Staying home is easier if there is family nearby, or if it is possible to hire home care and/or medical professionals to aid with some or all of the requirements of daily living. Before deciding on the option of staying home, evaluate the older person's capabilities, any medical problems, the ability of family members, friends and neighbors to help out, and the availability of home care services. These factors must all be considered before a decision can be made about whether staying home is the best option.

FAMILY

An elder can also move in with family, or the family can move in with an older adult, an adult child or a sister or brother, for instance. This option can help ease the pressures and problems associated with living alone, and can provide a built-in support system. For many people, such a situation works out wonderfully. Some caregivers find it more convenient to provide care when the elder is in their home, and many elders enjoy being close to their family members-particularly their grandchildren.

There are some disadvantages to moving in with family, however. Privacy and independence (for both the elder and their family members) become issues, as do meal preparation, space requirements, financial demands, transportation, childrearing and other responsibilities.

This option works well only if the lines of communication are kept open. If problems are not aired constructively, they may escalate into heated arguments. Frequent discussion is a must, as is honest expression of the feelings of everyone involved. When it works, it can be an ideal situation. When it doesn't, it can have painful consequences on all the family members.

RETIREMENT COMMUNITY, ASSISTED LIVING FACILITY OR NURSING HOME

There used to be only one choice if someone was going to live in an institution -- a nursing home. Now we have a multitude of choices.

Retirement communities can resemble an apartment or condominium complex, with many of the same amenities and freedoms. They provide a way for people to maintain a sense of independence at the same time as they provide a social network and the freedom from some chores-including yard work and house maintenance. Some offer progressive levels of assistance in order to adjust care as a person's needs increase.

Assisted living facilities provide a higher level of care, with nurses and physical therapists on staff, transportation and other offerings.

Nursing Homes are best for those who are no longer mobile or who need a high level of physical and/or emotional care.

These options typically cost more money and depend on factors such as insurance coverage, family contribution and estate worth.



Tips for Communicating Effectively with an Elder

The normal physical changes of aging affect sight and hearing. Cognitive impairments, such as those caused by a stroke, dementia or other neurological conditions, also can alter a person's ability to communicate. It's important for caregivers to understand how to help when these changes take place.

HEARING LOSS

You may have noticed an older person who has trouble hearing your conversations. Many older adults experience a gradual hearing loss that affects their knowledge of what's going on around them, as well as their safety.

- Help your elder get a professional hearing test.

- Help your elder get a properly fitted hearing aid from a professional, if necessary.

- Choose a quiet place to speak directly to your elder. Ask if speaking louder or slower helps him or her understand you better.

REDUCED SIGHT

Changes in eyesight can be gradual or rapid. Since people use their eyes to gather information, the loss of sight can also change behavior. If you're caring for an elder with vision problems:

- Make sure eyeglass prescriptions are up-to-date.

- Get large-print reading materials.

Try books on tape or other recorded materials.

Give him or her a magnifying glass.

Make sure rooms have adequate light.

SOCIAL CHANGES

Older people with vision and hearing problems may avoid other people.

Encourage them to socialize with others.

Let your elder know how much you care about his or her ideas, advice and company.

Reassure your elder that others care about him or her.

Explain the person's hearing and sight limitations to friends and family members.

COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENTS

People who have had strokes or those with Alzheimer's disease or other dementia may have trouble responding to normal conversation. If you take care of someone with such an impairment:

Learn all you can about the person's condition from a healthcare provider.

Be patient.

Try to understand and accept the person's abilities.

Be direct and use simple words.

Comfort and reassure the person.

Getting Started is Easy!

Call your EAP for more information.