

Caring for Yourself While Caring for Others

Caring for the needs of older adults who are unable to care for themselves is hard. Many caregivers do not feel prepared for this role. If you provide care for an older adult, you are not alone. More than 44 million Americans provide care to someone over age 50.

Caring for someone with complex needs includes making decisions and facing challenges that can be overwhelming. By planning ahead, you can be more realistic about what to expect. Start by talking with the person's physician to know if, or what, medical issues have been diagnosed. Learn as much as you can about their disease(s) and conditions. This will help you understand what will happen, what is safe, and what to look for if something is wrong. Get a nurse to teach you the tasks that you will do at home — and a phone number to call for any questions. You may want to attend a support group for your loved one's condition.

Talk about their wishes on subjects such as driving, living arrangements, and financial and legal matters, including advanced directives before the disease progresses. Consider inviting other caregivers to this meeting. By keeping conversations open and involving the person and caregivers whenever possible, you will be able to better prepare for the future.

Be positive, flexible, and maintain a sense of humor. Avoid situations that can cause stress. You may at some point accept that you have reached your limit and want to know what other options are available. The best choice will depend on the needs of the individual. It is important to consider the level of disability, safety needs, services required, personal preference, and, sometimes, financial coverage. Caring for another involves many sacrifices, but you do not have to do it alone. It is important to maintain a healthy balance for both the older adults and the caregiver. Many resources exist to help you in your role as the caregiver. Visit edustore.purdue.edu and type: *Aging Well: Caring for Yourself While Caring for Others* into the search bar to find a free publication with specific ideas on how to care for yourself, types of care available for adults, and additional resources for caregivers.