

Caregiving

For Someone with Diabetes

Most of us will take care of a family member or friend at some point in our lives. Family caregiving can be very rewarding. It can also be hard for both the person giving help and the loved one receiving help.

For many, caregiving is a long-term commitment. Taking the time to think through how it might work is a good thing.

Be open about asking for help from a variety of resources and welcome whatever help you are able to get. Tapping into family, friends and other community services can really help.

Caring for Someone with Diabetes

As a caregiver, learn the basics of diabetes management. The American Diabetes Association website is a great source of information about diabetes:

1. Go to www.diabetes.org.
2. Read “Diabetes Basics.”
3. Under the “Living with Diabetes” tab, review the information for seniors.
4. Review the section on Food and Fitness.

Taking Care of Yourself as the Caregiver

Caregiving can be stressful. Below are some ways to manage your stress:

- Continue to take care of your own health. Stay active, eat well and go to the doctor regularly.
- Find someone to talk to when caregiving gets to be too much.
- Avoid taking on too much and learn to say “no.”
- Ask for and accept help. Involve friends and family.
- Stay organized. Prioritize what needs to be done.





Can I do it?

As a caregiver, you are taking on the role of helping a loved one with those day-to-day things that we usually do for ourselves. You are the one who will ensure that they have a safe and healthy place to live.

Take a minute to think about the role of being a caregiver:

- Discuss the reasons your loved one needs a caregiver.
- Ask if it will be difficult for your loved one to accept help from a caregiver.
- Present the positives of having a caregiver handle certain things. For example, keeping track of when to take diabetes medicines.
- Find out how your loved one is dealing with the loss of independence and control.
- Make a caregiving plan. List the tasks that your loved one needs help with and who might take on which tasks.
- If your loved one appears overwhelmed by too many medicines or the frequency of self-care, talk to their health care provider about their care goals and quality of life issues, and how to make things simpler.
- Be realistic about community services. Sometimes the services provided through the health care and social service systems are limited, and may require you and your loved one to be flexible about your plan.
- Find out about getting a durable power of attorney for health care and finances for your loved one.

Caregiver training, if available in your community, can help. Also check out training books, websites and videos about being a caregiver.

How do I rally family members?

More often than not, one person in the family becomes the primary caregiver. And, getting everyone in the family, including siblings, to help out with some tasks, may become a cause of family stress.

Sometimes caregivers feel that other family members are not doing their share of helping out. To get everyone involved, think about ways they might best help out:

- Are they able to come by the house and help with cleaning once a week?
- Can they provide transportation to medical appointments or day services?
- Can they take your loved one to visit family or out for a meal once a week?
- Are they able to help manage finances for your loved one?
- Can they help cover the costs of a home health aide or home visitor?
- How else might they be able to help?

Some families find it helpful to create a calendar with assigned days and times. This allows multiple caregivers to juggle tasks.

Taking Care of Someone with Dementia

There may be a link between diabetes and dementia.

Many people have a hard time remembering things as they get older. Being forgetful sometimes is normal, but some people experience serious memory loss, personality changes or major confusion.

Be alert to changes in your loved one's behavior and personality. Ask health care providers if these changes might be a sign of dementia.

Make things as simple as possible for the person you are caring for:

- Use a diabetes meal plan like the Plate Method.
- Create a reminder or alarm system for when to take diabetes medicines.
- Use a pill box to organize diabetes medicines.
- Put medicines and glucose checking supplies where they are easy to find.
- Use a chart to check off when medicines/insulin are taken to avoid overdose.

Are there financial costs?

Many caregivers also find they end up paying for services and supplies. Surveys estimate that caregivers spend \$500 to \$5,500 per year out-of-pocket on a variety of costs:

- Medicines
- Medicine reminder services
- Personal emergency response systems
- Adult day care services
- Home health care services
- Groceries
- Home delivered meals
- Supplies



Taking the time to figure out a budget and look at finances long-term is helpful. Also, find out if some services may be income-based or based on a sliding fee scale. You may want to reach out to a financial planner.

Where else can I get help?

Taking care of a loved one can require time, energy, and patience. One person is not able to do it all. If family members cannot commit to a regular way to help, reach out to community for support.

Finding and accepting help often helps make the caregiving experience more positive for you and your loved one. Some families get help from home health aides, who help with bathing and dressing, as well as light cleaning and meal preparation. Ask your health care provider about these services and check with volunteer associations about others who might be willing to help out.

For more about living with diabetes, contact your local office of the American Diabetes Association.

