

Aid Your Aging Parents—and Take Care of Yourself, Too

If you're caring for aging parents, there's a good chance one or both of them has a chronic condition. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 85 percent of older adults in the U.S. have at least one. And 60 percent have two or more.

To assist your parents in managing their conditions, make an effort to learn more about their specific health concerns. Take advantage of online resources you can trust, such as government agencies, nonprofit organizations, or university medical center websites.

How to Help

Here are some other practical steps you can take to aid in your parents' well-being:

- Teach them to take medications correctly. First, review the system they use to track their medication intake. If it doesn't appear to be working—they miss doses or forget to take their meds—help them find a better way. For example, encourage them to try using a timed medication dispenser.
- Accompany them to doctor visits. By hearing directions from the doctor yourself, you can help ensure your parents follow the proper treatment. Take notes on what is discussed and ask questions if anything is unclear.

Manage Your Stress

Living with a chronic condition is stressful—for both you and your parents. Remember to take time for yourself. Being a caregiver can be highly stressful. If not managed properly, it can cause mental and physical illness, including anxiety, depression, and a compromised immune system. Reduce the caregiver burden by asking for help from family and friends. Alternatively, look for caregiving services available in your community. Also, remember to do the following:

- Get at least some exercise each day.
- Get help for depression.
- Take time to rest and relax.
- Join a support group.
- Find information and practical tips online on caregiving websites such as www.caregiveraction.org, www.wellspouse.org, or www.caregiver.org.
- Learn more about caregiving services by visiting Eldercare Locator at www.eldercare.gov.

Sources include U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Council on Aging, Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and Interventions, U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and National Institutes of Health.

