

## **From a Caregiver's Perspective**

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You are a Baby Boomer. You may be married; or may be single. You may be a homeowner or may rent. You may be a parent or not. You have a career. You may be a business owner, an executive, an entrepreneur. You are a working caregiver. You are stressed out, tired and overwhelmed. You need a break. What can you do?

Sound familiar? For those of us who have, are, or will be working caregivers to an elderly loved one, these statements are all too true! How do we balance the juggling act of spouse, children, career, parents needing help, and still retain a sense of who we are?

This is a growing epidemic that most do not speak about; an epidemic that is rapidly overwhelming us all, specifically us Boomers. Rarely do we hear complaining because there is no time to complain, let alone time for one's self. With this epidemic comes symptoms of exhaustion, guilt, and loss of one's personal life just to name a few. The amazing part of it all is that it not only strikes women, but has increasingly become something men experience and rarely mention.

Male or female, if you are one of us, you recognize the signs in others. The look of worry, lack of sleep, stressed, and even more apparent the affect on one's career. It is the life of a caregiver. And at the very least, it can be overwhelming. Your caregiving responsibilities may be 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. But you could be a long distance caregiver. Perhaps a part time caregiver, sharing responsibilities with a sibling, a spouse or your children. No matter the time involved, the obligations and demands on you are dragging you down.

Caregiving need not be a lonely and emotionally debilitating experience. According to the latest statistics on caregiving from the National Family Caregivers Association, nearly half of the U. S. population has a chronic condition. From that number, 41 million are limited in their daily activities while 12 million are unable to live independently or even leave the house. One can deduce from these numbers that there are millions of family caregivers out there, and with a little research, you can find a lot of support groups.

There are websites offering support and tips for relieving the stress placed on those of us who are 24 hour caregivers. But the one thing we must understand is that all the support, tips and advice in the world won't do much good if we don't listen and follow at least some of it. Caregiving is much like the instructions a flight attendant gives you before takeoff. They tell you to put your own oxygen mask on first, before trying to help someone else. That's right – if you don't take care of you, the two of you will need care. What a fine mess that would be!

If you work for a company, a good place to start is to ask your supervisor or human resources group if they know of any resources to help you. Those resources could range from referrals to non-medical home care agencies to a provider for an emergency response system. It could mean lunch time classes for you and your coworkers to learn about these products and services, as well as how to manage the myriad of other concerns such as financial, legal, and end of life issues.

Ask if your church, temple, synagogue or mosque if they offer assistance and information on elder care. Perhaps they have a visiting nurse that could make an assessment of your loved one's circumstances. Maybe you find a support group of people experiencing the same issues you are going through. It helps to just talk it out.

You must take time for you. If you are stopping by Dad's house everyday and a short visit turns into several hours, there are things that aren't getting done in your life. Does he need to visit his Doctor? Who takes him? Does Mom need groceries? If so, are you responsible for shopping? Are they eating nourishing meals if left alone? All these little things take you away from your job, your family and your life.

Consider hiring a non-medical home care company to help you out. Even if it's just to fix and share a meal at lunchtime, it will certainly ease your load. Go to the movies; go to the spa, whatever makes you feel good and don't feel guilty about it.

Everything we do in life can be viewed as a positive or a negative. Try to look at your caregiving as a positive in your life. Accept that your elder loved one didn't ask to be a burden on you, but that it's something that happens to every one. It will give you the chance to really get to know that person in ways you never thought possible. Ask them to tell you stories and learn from their experiences. But keep in mind, that even though you've heard the same story over and over, they won't be with you forever and when they are gone, you'll wish you could hear the story again. Also remember that you will be following in their footsteps. Yes, none of us are getting any younger and when our elders are gone, we become the "seniors."