



Live Healthy Georgia

Seniors Taking Charge

Giving Thanks, Giving Care

November 2012

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As the year is winding down and the holiday season begins anew, November brings a time of reflection. In particular, a time for giving thanks for our loved ones and other blessings. Our loved ones play many roles throughout our lives – head cheerleader, advice giver, comic relief, a shoulder to cry on, a voice of reason to keep us on track, and more. Importantly, though, our loved ones often provide us with care.

Many people think of caregiving in the younger years. Our first experience with caregiving is in infancy and childhood. We rely on our parents or other relatives to help us eat, bathe, get dressed, and get around until we are able to do these tasks ourselves. As adults, we may continue to rely on our family and friends when we are sick – nothing beats a home-cooked meal or wisdom from Mom. However, this type of care is usually temporary – expected only until we recover.

As we get older, however, we may find that we are the ones who need more care. Surgery, prolonged illness, and other health issues often make it difficult for us to do what we've always done. We may no longer be able to drive ourselves safely due to poor eyesight or arthritis, for example. Cooking and cleaning may seem like arduous tasks. Physical limitations may not allow us to easily dress ourselves. We may have to rely on someone else to help us.

Caregiving Statistics

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| Number of caregivers in the United States | 65+ million |
| Caregivers as percentage of U.S. population | 29% |
| Average hours per week spent on caregiving | 20 hours |
| Percentage of caregivers providing 40+ hours of care per week | 13% |
| Percentage of family caregivers who are women | 66% |
| Average age of family caregiver | 49 years |
| Percentage of community-dwelling older adults requiring care who rely on family members as only source of care | 78% |

Most caregivers are more than happy to help their charge, especially if it is a parent. Many caregivers have a sense of “duty” about taking care of a loved one. However, caregiving can impact the caregiver’s life in a variety of areas:

- finances
- health
- work life

Finances. Family caregivers often spend a significant portion of their earnings on care-related needs. Almost half of all working caregivers claim to have nearly depleted their savings accounts on care-related expenses. Indeed, the value of services provided by family caregivers is estimated to be \$375 billion.

Health. Family caregivers usually put themselves at the bottom of their “to-do” list. Over half report having poor eating and physical activity habits. In addition, over 70% do not go to the doctor as often as they should, and over 50% have canceled appointments for themselves. Because of lack of self-care, many caregivers are likely to develop health-related problems. In addition, many people caring for family members develop depression.



Work life. People who continue to work while caring for a family member often have to make adjustments to their work schedule. In addition, many feel that their quality of work diminishes as a result of the requirements of caring for a family member. Businesses in the United States may lose \$34 billion due to their employees’ needs related to caring for an older adult.

Give Thanks and Care for Caregivers

What can you do to help your caregiver (or someone you know who is a caregiver)?

- Encourage the caregiver to ask for and accept help.
- Encourage the caregiver to say “no” to tasks or activities that are draining.
- Encourage the caregiver to stay in touch with other family members and friends.
- Encourage the caregiver to do something enjoyable, such as go to a movie, at least once a week.
- Encourage the caregiver to eat healthy and get physical activity daily.
- Encourage the caregiver to join a support group, if needed.
- Encourage the caregiver to go to a doctor and discuss any symptoms, illnesses, or feelings of depression.
- Tell your caregiver “thank you” often.

References

National Family Caregivers Association. Caregiving statistics. Available from http://www.thefamilycaregiver.org/who_are_family_caregivers/care_giving_statistics.cfm

USDHHS, Office on Women’s Health. Caregiver stress fact sheet. <http://www.womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/caregiver-stress.cfm#f>

Pictures

- http://eaicareprovider.files.wordpress.com/2010/04/people_caregiver.jpg
- <http://www.easierlivingblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/caregiver-stress.jpg>