

WHAT! ME, A CAREGIVER?



BY SUSAN LANDEIS | SEPTEMBER 27, 2016

Have you ever wondered what it was really like to care for a loved one, or how it might impact your life? Most of us took on this role because of our love and concern for our care recipient, often with very little knowledge or preparation. In the beginning, trying to navigate in unfamiliar territory can be daunting and overwhelming! It's hard to know just where to begin, and everyone's set of circumstances are going to be different.

At some point in our lives, many of us will find ourselves taking on the role of caring for a loved one. Elderly people are living longer and more people are living with chronic illnesses and disabilities. According to statistics, more than sixty-five million people in the United States provide care for a loved one, and this number will continue to grow with advanced medicine and technology.

Here are some tips:

- 1) Educate yourself as much as possible about your loved one's illness or disability. Take a class, read books and articles, or join a support group. The more you learn, the more confident you will feel.
- 2) Encourage your loved one's independence as much as possible. Caregiving does not mean that you must do everything. Look for strategies and technologies that can help them help themselves. This benefits them as much as it does you!

- 3) Know your limitations. Be realistic about how much time you can spend caring for your loved one, especially if you are working or have a family. Make a list of duties that you can reasonably manage. Never be afraid to ask for help from other family members or outside sources!
- 4) Take time to learn about their medications, dosage, and possible side effects. Become familiar with the time of day they should be taken. A medication organizer with the times of day can be helpful.
- 5) Take safety precautions. Whether your loved one lives with you or in their own home, it's important to look for hidden dangers that could turn into a potentially hazardous situation. For instance, check the main living areas for loose rugs or poorly lit stairways where accidents could occur. You may consider a medical alert device that provides around-the-clock monitoring services.
- 6) Pay attention to their diets. Elderly people have different nutritional needs for many reasons. It may be due to a specific medical condition, dental issues or digestive problems. It's always important to make sure they are getting an adequate amount of nutrition in their diets.
- 7) Don't forget to care for yourself! Caregiving can be both physically and emotionally demanding. Often times as caregivers we neglect our own health and well-being, believing we should put our loved one first. Caring for yourself is never selfish. You cannot properly care for someone else if you are struggling. As a caregiver, self-care is just as important to you as it is for your loved one!

Caregiving is one of the most challenging, yet rewarding roles you will ever experience! As a caregiver myself, I understand the struggles many of you face. As a certified nutritionist, I realize the importance of diet, nutrition, and well-being for you and your loved one. I have written a book, "Optimal Caregiving: A guide for managing senior health and well-being", that addresses your concerns about nutritional needs, meal preparation, safety tips, healthy aging, and self-care for the caregiver. My book is available for purchase at www.amazon.com.