

July 2020

Boomers, Elders, & More E-Newsletter

A Monthly Elder Care Newsletter of the
Vanderbilt Child & Family Center



A Message from the Wellbeing Manager

The role of a family caregiver brings uncertainties and mix emotions. As of recently, many have reported those emotions have amplified. If you are a working caregiver, you are struggling to balance work (maybe remotely) and providing additional hours of care to your aging loved one.

While you are going above and beyond during this uncertain time, it is important to find time to take care of yourself. Burnout can interfere with your ability to be an effective employee and caregiver. To be the best caregiver, start with loving yourself.

Taking care of yourself can be accomplished in many ways:

- Nutrition - Start your day with a healthy breakfast and replace processed snacks with fruits and vegetables.
- Exercise - Schedule 30 minutes a day for some type of physical activity. Exercise can provide the benefits of stress-reduction and may boost self-esteem.
- Express Yourself - Journaling can help boost your mood and improve your sense of well-being.
- Sleep – Most adults need 7 to 8 hours of good quality sleep on a regular schedule each night. Sleep helps keep your mind and body healthy.
- Unwind - At the end of the day take a bubble bath, read a book or listen to a podcast. Engaging in activities you enjoy can give your mind a break from endless headlines.

If feelings of selfishness and inadequacy are preventing you from pursuing self-care, know this is natural. Identifying these emotions can help you overcome them. Reframe and remind yourself: Caring for yourself is caring for others.

A graphic with a dark brown background and rounded corners, containing a quote in white text.

“I have come to believe
that caring for myself is
not self indulgent.
Caring for myself is an
act of survival.” – Audre Lorde

Family caregivers span all generations, new AARP study finds

By: Lauren J. Mapp

Trends are changing when it comes to the demographics of people serving as caregivers for their loved ones, but so is the availability of support resources.

A new study from the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP found that more than 1 in 5 Americans are unpaid family caregivers, and they are now more likely to be caring for multiple family members.

The two organizations polled 1,392 participants in an online survey. The questions focused on both the caregiver's personal traits and their experiences as caregivers. One change since the study was last conducted five years ago is that family caregivers now span all generations, including millennials (who were born between 1981 and 1996) and Generation Z (all those born after 1997). A greater number of people are also caring for family members with dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

"I would say that what we're seeing is that the profile of families that take on a caregiving role is changing, and changing somewhat dramatically with a shift toward more complex role and responsibilities, said Lynn Feinberg, AARP senior strategic policy adviser.

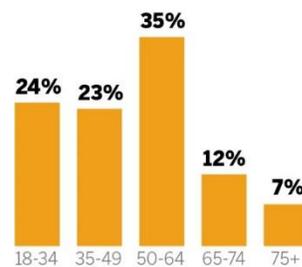
Advocates often push for more support for caregivers so they can maintain their own health or "pour from a full glass" while caring for another person. The study confirms that it is easier said than done.

Among caregivers, 21 percent reported that their own health status was fair or poor, compared with 17 percent when the study was last completed in 2015. And more than half of those polled did not feel like they had a choice when it came to becoming a caregiver.

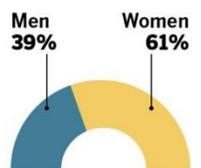
Adult caregiver demographics

Three in five caregivers in the U.S. are women, the average age is 49.4 years and six in 10 are White.

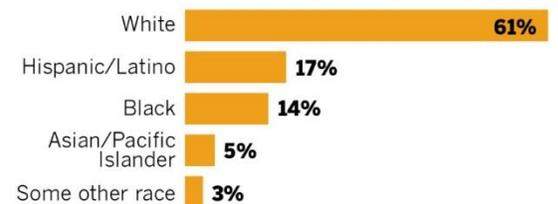
Average age



Gender



Race/ethnicity

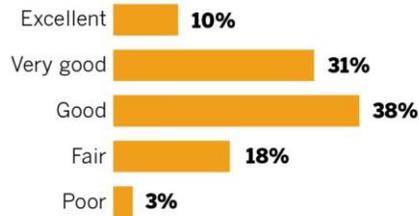


Source: AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving

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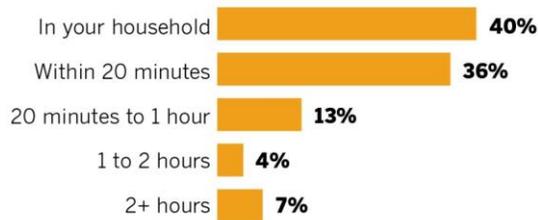
Adult caregiver self-rated health

One-fifth of caregivers report their health is fair or poor.



Caregiver distance from recipient

More than three-quarters of caregivers live within 20 minutes of their care recipient.



Source: AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving

MICHELLE GILCHRIST U-T

carers for oneself while caring for a loved one. About 1 in 4 caregivers, however, said it is difficult to find affordable support services near them.

Responses to the family caregiver survey were collected in early 2020, before the widespread social-distancing efforts cause by the coronavirus pandemic. As more businesses and public spaces are allowed to open, adult day care centers and senior outreach programs have largely remained closed because of the increased risk of COVID-19 for the senior populations.

Feinberg said that at time, caregivers are most likely feeling heightened levels of stress and isolation.

“You can only imagine how the pandemic has added uncertainty and stress to these already challenging caregiving situations,” she said.

Reaching out to support groups and organizations that serve caregivers is a key aspect to successfully

“There are four kinds of people in the world:
Those who have been caregivers;
Those who are currently caregivers;
Those who will be caregivers;
And those who will need caregivers.”

- Rosalyn Carter, Former First Lady
of the United States

Find the full article at <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/caregiver/news-for-caregivers/story/2020-06-16/aarp-caregiver-study>

Overcoming Feelings of Dread as a Family Caregiver

Rally past negative feelings and find joy in your day

By: Barry J. Jacobs, a clinical psychologist, family therapist and healthcare consultant



Upon waking each morning, Elizabeth's first thoughts were about having to dress and shave her father, count his pills and comb his hair, and cajole him into the car before dropping him off at his adult day care program. These thoughts were almost immediately followed by her first emotion of the day – a pit-in-the-stomach dread. She wanted to take care of him and made that commitment to him, her deceased mother and herself. But after months of the same morning routine of time-consuming and mind-numbing caregiving tasks, she felt reluctant to force herself out of bed before daybreak to do it all again.

Dread is a common state of mind for people engaged in ongoing difficult endeavors and is not necessarily a symptom of depression or anxiety.

Elizabeth did not feel overwhelming sadness or fear so much as heavy weariness and irritation from the constant caregiving pressures. She felt hemmed in by her commitment at times and just wanted a temporarily escape. "If only I could have a day by myself at the beach," she mused. But she never left her father in anyone else's care for more than a few hours.

Dread is not synonymous with burnout, although it often accompanies. It can be a normal and expectable reaction that some caregivers experience, especially as caregiving drags on. Elizabeth felt no urge to quit caregiving – she would rally herself as usual that day – but she longed to pull the covers up over her head for a few more hours of rest.

Waking with a feeling of dread can sometimes make family caregivers feel guilty as if it means they are bad family members and begrudging caregivers. When she did not immediately rise with a ready smile for her dad, eager to help him, Elizabeth would be angry with herself. However, the fact that she could just push past the exhaustion to reliably and consistently do what he needed done was daily proof of her discipline, devotion and love.

Dread is prevalent in caregiving but also unpleasant and uncomfortable. Here are some ideas to help you either accept these feelings or overcome them the best you can.

Anticipate joy in your day – Even an overly busy caregiver’s life cannot be all toil. There must be moments of beauty, intimacy and humor to sustain you. That could be a fresh bouquet of wildflowers on the table or a new joke sent to your smartphone every morning. It could be a robust cup of coffee or a perfectly browned slice of toast. Better yet, it could be remembering with the loved one you are caring for, the chorus of an old song or the swinging band that played it. Those small instances of joy provide replenishment and bolster a caregiver’s reserve to better withstand the hard work and drudgery.

Accept that caregiving can be hard – Caregiving can be a dirty, dull job. No family

caregiver should feel guilty for being unhappy with its many onerous tasks. Instead, it is helpful to separate how you feel about caregiving and your sentiments toward the person on whose behalf you are making sacrifices. You can love the care recipient and still hate caregiving. You can light up the sight of your loved one but still groan with morning dread about having to groom him. You can want to help and still fantasize about running away.

Get respite care – When your energy is depleted, taking a break from routine is one of the surest ways to find new energy and vigor. Likewise, relaxation and rest counter caregiver dread and respite – getting someone else to fill in as caregiver while you take a break – is one of the foundational elements of many caregiver support programs.

Beware of burnout – While feelings of occasional dread are normal, they can also be the first signs of abnormal reactions to caregiving that can undermine a caregiver’s ability to continue. We say caregivers have burned out when they feel all-consuming dread during every waking moment whether they are engaged in caregiving tasks or not. No beauty or humor can replenish them and respite does not remedy how they feel. If you find that you cannot shake dread, then it may be time to consider significantly changing the caregiving plan.

Upcoming Events

FAMILY CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUP

The Caregiver Support Group is a monthly group that offers a safe place to discuss the stresses, challenges, and rewards of providing care for an aging loved one. The meetings will be held virtually for the foreseeable future from noon to 1 p.m.

July's session will be held on Thursday, July 16, 2020 from noon to 1 p.m.

Please RSVP

(stacey.l.bonner@vanderbilt.edu) for Zoom details by Wednesday, July 15.



LUNCHTIME SESSION

The Lunchtime Session is a monthly educational session to receive valuable information while providing care to your loved one.

Lynn Wood, Caregiver Support Coordinator at Mental Health America of Midsouth, will discuss how to incorporate respite breaks in short periods of time while working remotely. Short respite breaks, throughout the day, will benefit the caregiver and the care receiver.

July's lunchtime session will be held virtually on Thursday, July 23, 2020 from noon to 1 p.m.

Please RSVP

(stacey.l.bonner@vanderbilt.edu) for Zoom details by Wednesday, July 22.

