

Boomers, Elders, and More E-Newsletter

200 Appleton Place
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<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/child-family-center/>

Message from the Coordinator

Caring for an ill loved one isn't easy; in fact it can be one of the most challenging roles one can take on. Countless people have found themselves in the role of long-distance caregiver when they least expected it. According to the National Alliance, there are 34 million Americans who provide care to a loved one; with 15% of those people being long-distance caregivers. Having to handle caregiving long-distance can cause one to experience high levels of stress, excess worry for their loved one's safety, and feelings of helplessness at time. However, many have done it effectively before you. The good news, long distance caregiving is not nearly as overwhelming as it was even twenty years ago. In addition, you can keep in touch with a loved one on the ubiquitous cell phone, Skype, or Facetime when you are away from them. Despite such challenges, it is possible to make success of long distance caregiving.

Below are some ways to ease your worries while caring from a distance:

- ✓ **Meet the caregivers.** If possible, meet in-home or care home caregivers face to face, at least once. For those in a nursing home or assisted living community: The administrator, nursing director, social workers, activities director, physicians, case manager, and nurses on your parent's floor or unit are some of the key people who will be interacting with your parent.
- ✓ **Get to know the neighbors.** If you haven't already, next time you visit, get to know your parent's close friends and neighbors, especially if your parent lives independently. Check in with them regularly to get their perspective of how your parents are doing.
- ✓ **Keep in touch.** Maintaining close relationships with your loved one's caregiving community is smart, helpful, and easier than ever. Ask them how they would like to keep in touch: email, Facebook, text, daily phone call? Get and use their contact info. Technology is a strong ally.
- ✓ **Schedule a regular care management call.** In addition to casual check-ins, schedule regular conference calls with key points of contact. Frequency and length may vary depending on your parent's condition.
- ✓ **Network. Many religious organizations offer outreach to seniors.** Local fraternal organizations or clubs like the Lions or AFW might also be willing to visit or call your loved one. Many communities have friendly visitor volunteer organizations.
- ✓ **Be thankful.** Thank your parent's caregivers, friends and providers often. Send thank you notes or a quick email when you observe special care. Order holiday gift baskets for nursing staff and home health aides. Let people know that their help is truly appreciation

News Highlights

Preventing Senior Accidental Overdoses

By: Gary Barg

A growing concern for family caregivers is the possibility of a loved one's accidental overdose. This is an issue I hear about with alarming frequency as we travel the country on our Fearless Caregiver Conference tour. If nothing else, the statistics bear out the potential for danger to our loved ones.

Older women consume 60 percent of all prescription and over-the-counter medications. The number of prescriptions written for older adults averages 18.5 per person per year, and 83 percent of people over 65 are taking prescription medications. With this many medications to take on a regular basis, an accidental overdose could be a problem for anyone; but for many of our loved ones, the risks are increased by memory loss, hearing difficulties and low vision.

It is vitally important that, as caregivers, we pay attention to the potential for an accidental overdose by a loved one.

Some things we can do:

- Pay attention to any changes in their speech patterns, mental acuity, physical strength or level of depression or confusion.
- Regularly check the medicine cabinet and refrigerator for medication usage patterns, expiration dates, and to ensure timely refills.
- Scoop all of the prescription bottles into a paper bag and carry them to their pharmacist to ensure that all medications work well together. If you take all prescriptions to one pharmacist, they can more easily cross-reference drugs to look for any potential adverse side effects. Actually, it is best to use the same pharmacy for all prescriptions. One of the most important partnerships we can have with a care professional is often overlooked – the pharmacist.
- Many of our loved ones are receiving medications from multiple doctors. Make a list of all the prescriptions and any over-the-counter medications they are taking and send it to your loved one's primary care physician for review.



When discussing these concerns with your loved ones, remember that your most effective weapons against an accidental overdose are respect and understanding. Successful medication management works best when you are working as a team.

Source: <https://caregiver.com/cg-community/editors-pen/preventing-accidental-overdose/>

4 Ways a Caregiver Can Encourage a Loved One's Independence

By Barry J. Jacobs, AARP



Many caregivers struggle with finding a balance between doing too much and too little. This is all the more complicated when a care receiver's abilities change from day to day or even hour to hour. There should be an understanding that caregivers won't take over any tasks unless they absolutely have to. But whether help is or isn't necessary is open to endless debate between earnest caregivers and proud care receivers.

How do we maintain our loved ones' independence and morale by providing them with the right amount of support to optimize their functioning? Here are some ideas taken from our new book, *AARP Meditations for Caregivers*:

Powwow and plan. Even before your parent clearly needs help, talk with her about how her capabilities may change as she ages. This is not being presumptuous; it's being realistic. Begin a conversation about how she might one day cope with diminished physical and cognitive abilities and how you might best support her.

Don't jump in with help too quickly. Be cautious before introducing change into an aging parent's life or risk resistance. Observe your parent's behavior and functioning over time and then confirm your perceptions with others who also know her well before concluding that she actually requires assistance at this time.

Focus on what your loved one can still do. Steer her toward her strengths — for example, talking on the phone if she hasn't the eyesight or fine dexterity to legibly write, setting the table if she hasn't the organizational skills to cook a full-course meal, or remembering old times if she's lost short-term recall.

Frame help as empowering. Tell your parent that your job is to help her live as well as possible as she gets older. Reassure her that the goal is to enable her to continue to do the things she still wants to do — just as leaning on a cane, for example, might help someone walk farther than she might otherwise. Emphasize that you may be the cane but that she is still traveling the path of her own life.

For more information about this article please visit: <https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/life-balance/info-2017/encourage-independence-bjj.html>

Are You Eligible for the Family Caregiver Tax Credit?

Caregivers provide a variety of services for senior citizens every year. Many times these caregivers are taking care of their parents or loved ones and often will pay for medical expenses with their money. If you are a caregiver, you might be eligible to receive certain caretaker tax breaks and deductions. These deductions can help defray the cost of taking care of your loved one and will allow you to give them the best care possible.

Claim Them as Dependents

The first thing that you will want to do is see if you can claim your loved one as a dependent. There are a few ways that you can see if you meet the qualifications to claim them as dependents:

- They are a relative that either lives with you or in their home
- They have an income that is less than \$3,950 before Social Security benefits
- You pay for more than half of their medical expenses
- They are a non-relative who has lived with you for more than six months

If you can claim your loved one as a dependent, you will be able to take a tax deduction on your taxable income that tax year.

Claim Medical Expenses

If you can claim your relative as a dependent, you might also be able to claim a tax benefit for their medical costs. Medical costs, as defined by the IRS, are the costs of diagnosis, cure, mitigation, treatment, or prevention of disease, and the costs for treatments. To claim these medical expenses, you need to meet two requirements:

1. You must be paying for more than 50% of their total medical expenses; and
2. Your total represented medical cost is more than 10 percent of your adjusted gross income.

If your loved one is 65 or older that number moves from 10% to 7.5%. If you meet those two requirements, you can deduct the difference of the medical expenses from the total 10% or 7.5% of your adjusted gross income.

Decide Who Gets the Deductions

If you and other relatives are providing care for your loved one, you will have to decide who can receive the tax benefits. Only one person can claim the parent or loved one as a dependent and file for the tax exemptions. You will have to decide before taxes which of you will file the dependent claim. That person will then need to file a Form 2120, Multiple Support Declaration, as well as have all the others who provide care sign the form saying they will not claim the relative as a dependent.



For more information visit: <https://www.senioradvisor.com/blog/2015/11/caregiver-tax-credit/>

March Upcoming Events

Vanderbilt Family Resource Center's Caregiver Support group will be held on Wednesday, March 7, 2018 from noon to 1 p.m. at Medical Center East in room 419D the caregiver support group is a time to share information and openly discuss your problems without judgment, to process your feelings, and to hear others talk about their expectations.

This month's Boomers, Elders, and More Lunchtime session will be held on Thursday, March 22, 2018 from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. in Light Hall, Room 437. Join Kanah Lewallen, DNP, will be discussing 'How to Talk to Your Loved One's Health Care Provider'. In this discussion she will provide caregivers with tools on how to communicate with your loved one's health care team, as well as cover current issues that attendees are having and ways to communicate your concerns.

Daily Reminder...



If you need information or resources to assist you in your caregiving role, contact Denisha Morris, Family Services Coordinator, at denisha.m.morris@vanderbilt.edu or 615-936-1990

