

October 2020

# Boomers, Elders, and More E-Newsletter

Monthly Elder Care Newsletter of the Vanderbilt Child & Family Center

## A Message from the Wellbeing Manager

October is quite an important month for seniors. Not only does this month mark the beginning of open enrollment, but it also serves as an annual observance to call attention to the need to improve communication about medications.

As you age it is important to know about your medications to avoid possible problems. As you get older you may be faced with more health conditions that you need to treat on a regular basis. It is important to be aware that more use of medications and normal body changes caused by aging can increase the chance of unwanted or maybe even harmful drug interactions.

The more you know about your medications and the more you talk with your health care professionals, the easier it is to avoid problems with medications. Here are a few tips for safe medication use:

**Learn about your medicines.** Read medicine labels and package inserts and follow the directions.

**Keep track of side effects or possible drug interactions** and let your doctor know right away about any unexpected symptoms or changes in the way you feel.

**Make sure to go to all doctor appointments** and to any appointments for monitoring tests done by your doctor or at a laboratory.

**Use a calendar, pill box or other things,** to help you remember what you need to take and when. Write down information your doctor gives you about your medicines or your health condition.

**Have a “Medicine Check-Up” at least once a year.** Go through your medicine cabinet to get rid of old or expired medicines and ask your doctor or pharmacist to go over all medications you now take. Do not forget to tell them about all the over-the-counter medications or any vitamins, dietary supplements, and herbals you take. Check with your local law enforcement agency on upcoming medicine take back events in your community.

Find the full article at <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/resources-you-drugs/medicines-and-you-guide-older-adults>



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## Long-Distance Caregiving: Key Steps to Providing Care from Afar

Steady communication and building a trusted team are crucial – AARP – Updated May 15, 2020

Long-distance caregivers have the same concerns and pressures as local caregivers – and then some. Often, the most significant challenge they face is simply staying informed and assured that the person needing care is in capable hands. That's why a long-distance caregiver cannot do without good communication and a solid team on the ground.

Here are five steps to staying informed and effective as a long-distance caregiver and tips for putting the measures in place.

### 1. Establish access

Having good information channels and legal authority to make financial and health-care decisions is important. Try to arrange as much as possible during an in-person visit, when you can work with your loved one to locate, organize, and fill out necessary paperwork.

- **Start the money conversation.** Discussing finances is often difficult, but you need to get the lay of the land. Devise a plan with your loved one for how to pay for health care and everyday expenses. Consider how much is on hand in savings and investments, the size of major payments such as housing, and whether your loved one has long-term care insurance.
- **Address legal issues.** If your loved one hasn't yet designated a durable power of attorney for health care and financial decisions, ask whether you or some other trusted person can take on that role. If your loved



one has no power of attorney and becomes physically or cognitively unable to choose one, the courts will have to step in.

- **Know emergency basics.** Can someone else get into the home in an urgent situation? Does the property have a burglar alarm, and what's the code? Keep a friendly neighbor's phone number handy and ask the neighbor to do the same with yours.

### 2. Create a team

While you can handle plenty of important tasks remotely, you'll need others to be your eyes, ears, and sometimes hands. It's natural for long-distance caregivers to feel guilty about delegating certain jobs, but don't try to do it all, especially if your loved one has more serious or complicated health issues.

- **Build your team.** Beyond medical professionals, it's important to reach out to friends, family and community groups to form a network of caregiving helpmates.
- **Determine roles.** Ask what tasks, large or small, team members are willing and able to do. A neighbor might be happy to cut the lawn. Another family member might volunteer to drive to doctor appointments.
- **Keep a roster.** Compile a list of contact info for everyone and

keep it up to date. The list should include hired helpers such as a housecleaner or dog walker. Be sure they know how to reach you as well.

### 3. Find a local coordinator

A local care manager who can supply local knowledge and help with caregiving logistics often can be useful. One option is to hire a reputable caregiving professional. These professionals, often licensed nurse or social workers also can be valuable mediators or sounding boards when family members disagree on care decisions or you're facing tough choices.

- **Verify credentials.** Look for professional certifications. Consider how long a person has been in the field, and request references.
- **Discuss availability and areas of expertise.** Certified care managers offer a wide range of services.
- **Consider cost.** Care managers typically charge \$50 to \$200 an hour. Medicare does not cover this service, nor do most health insurance plans. But if you can afford it, an experienced manager may be able to save your family time, money and stress with even a brief consultation.

### 4. Stay in the loop

Establish ways to communicate regularly with your local team and loved one, whether through organization apps, group emails or social tools.

- **Make use of technology.** With your loved one's permission – or the legal proxy's – you can put tools in place such as video monitors, wearable activity trackers, remote door locks to

prevent wandering (if the care recipient has dementia), and even electronic pill dispensers that can notify you if someone has taken the prescribed medications.

- **Find ways to coordinate.** Set up an email group you can use to keep everyone up to date.

### 5. Make the most of visits

Nothing replaces an in-person visit. When you can manage one, come with a list of things you need to know or discuss. Try to stretch the visit so you can spend time with your loved one and schedule key face-to-face appointments related to their well-being.

- **Note where new help is needed.** Is a faucet dripping or the lawn overgrown? Does your loved one appear to be having trouble doing certain chores, such as laundry or grocery shopping? Help with tasks while you're there, but also evaluate whether you need to find someone local to assist day-to-day.
- **Look for signs of abuse.** Ask to see your loved one's checking account and look for abnormalities and watch for red flags of physical or emotional mistreatment, such as bruises, unexplained injuries, or an abrupt change in personality. Be very concerned if your loved one mentions someone you've never met who visits often and has been "helpful."
- **Have fun together.** While you might have many practical tasks to check off your list, it's important to spend quality time with your loved one.

## Doctor Visit Checklist

By: Caregiver Action Network

You may want to accompany your care recipient to doctor's appointments. This way, you and your care recipient can work together as members of the health care team and ensure that you both understand the recommended medical course of action. This is an especially important role if your care recipient is cognitively impaired.

Here is a checklist to help you make the most of your doctor's visit:

### **Before the Visit:**

- Write down all questions or any concerns you might have so you don't forget them. This will help you state them clearly. Regardless of how significant you feel the doctor may think it is – ASK!
- Identify current symptoms.
- Update the patient file and medication list. Be sure to include all medications, over the counter drugs and supplements.
- Call to confirm appointment.

### **During the Visit:**

- Bring the updated medication list.
- Clearly report all of your loved one's symptoms.
- Ask your questions and record the answers.
- Record doctor's instructions.
- Discuss recommendations.
- Verify follow-up.

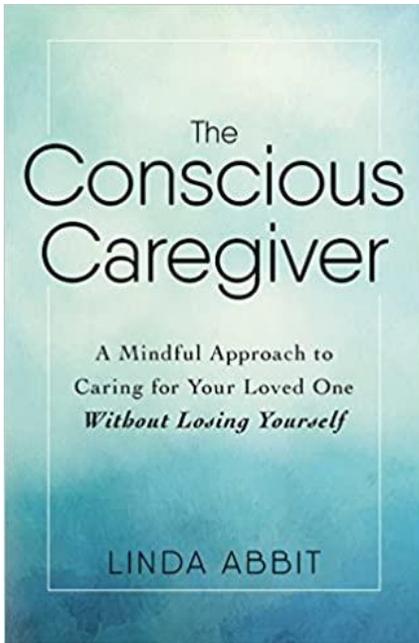
### **After the Visit:**

- Review your notes.
- Check prescriptions.
- Discuss the visit.
- Update your calendar.
- Call for test results.

Find the full article at: <https://caregiveraction.org/doctor-visit-checklist>

Caregiving does  
not get easier.  
You just get  
stronger.

[visitingthegrayplanet.com](http://visitingthegrayplanet.com)



## *Are You Losing Yourself As A Family Caregiver?*

The book of the month is an absolute essential if you are looking for resources on how to appreciate life's little moments and how to prevent the duties of caregiving from overwhelming your heart and mind.

The author advocates for a mindful approach to caregiving which incorporates self-care, time for rest, communication, and patience.

### *Family Caregiver Tips*

1. Caregiving is a job and respite is your earned right. **Reward yourself** with respite breaks often.
2. **Watch out** for signs of depression, and do not delay in getting professional help when you need it.
3. When people offer to help, **accept the offer**, and suggest specific things that they can do.
4. **Educate yourself** about your loved one's condition and how to communicate effectively with doctors.
5. There is a difference between caring and doing. **Be open** to technologies and ideas that promote your loved one's independence.
6. **Trust your instincts**. Most of the time they will lead you in the right direction.
7. Caregivers often do a lot of lifting, pushing, and pulling. **Be good to your back**.
8. Grieve for your losses, and then allow yourself to **dream new dreams**.
9. **Seek support** from other caregivers. There is great strength in knowing you are not alone.
10. **Stand up for your rights** as a caregiver and a citizen.

Find the full article on [https://caregiveraction.org/doc/pdf/10\\_tips.pdf](https://caregiveraction.org/doc/pdf/10_tips.pdf)

### **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.

October's session will be held on Thursday, October 8, 2020 from noon to 1 p.m. Please RSVP ([stacey.l.bonner@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:stacey.l.bonner@vanderbilt.edu)) for Zoom details by Wednesday, October 7.



### **LUNCHTIME SESSION**

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

Kayse Martin, Community Outreach & Volunteer Coordinator with Council on Aging of Middle Tennessee, will speak on the many resources and services Council on Aging have available for those who are caring from a distance or living with an older adult.



October's lunchtime session will be held virtually on Wednesday, October 14, 2020 from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. Please RSVP ([stacey.l.bonner@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:stacey.l.bonner@vanderbilt.edu)) for Zoom details by Tuesday, October 13.