

September 2021

Boomers, Elders, & More E-Newsletter

Monthly Elder Care Newsletter of the Vanderbilt Child & Family Center



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A Message from the Wellbeing Manager

Those who are drawn to become caregivers are very good at taking care of others but, often, not so good at caring for themselves. One of the most difficult aspects of being a caregiver for another person is finding time to take care of your own needs. Caregiving is an unpredictable, chaotic and continuous task so it can feel impossible to create a schedule that includes time for self-nurturing and rest.

We know the truth of the adage: “You cannot draw water from an empty well.” To continue caring for those you love, it is vitally important that you learn how to meet your own needs and “fill your own well.” Otherwise, there will come a day when you have nothing left to give and everyone will suffer.

Here are some tips for making sure that your inner well of love doesn’t run dry:

1. **Take several small “breathers” a day.**
Even within the busiest schedule there are small moments when it is possible to escape the stress and chaos. One of the best ways to do this is to stop what you are doing and take 3 long, slow, deep breaths.
2. **Eat a high protein snack once or twice a day.**
Protein snacks help keep your blood sugar from swinging up and down, which can cause fatigue, headaches and irritability. When you nourish yourself with a small, healthy snack that is rich in protein you’ll have more balanced energy and moods throughout the day.
3. **Find a new perspective.**
Sometimes life is just really hard – in fact, it can “suck” as some people say. There are many occurrences in life over which we have no control, situations we cannot change, and losses we cannot forget. But we can shift our mindset and look at life from a different point of view.

Remember, above all, to be gentle with yourself if you are a stressed caregiver. Don’t expect perfection from yourself; know that your best effort is enough. Let love flow into you without judgment or guilt and envision the well filling up to the brim. Then you will be able to love others from all of the abundance that you carry within and your well will never run dry.

Find the full article at: [Tips for Staying Healthy While Being a Caregiver for Someone Else | HuffPost Life](#)



Caregiving Impacts Every Family in All Walks of Life

By: Nancy LeaMond
(AARP's chief advocacy and engagement officer)

Finally, after many years, the word is starting to spread on Capitol Hill: Family caregivers need more support. Better yet, the message is reaching both sides of the aisle.

That's my big takeaway from a recent Facebook Live event, Caring for the Caregivers. I was privileged to participate in the discussion, which featured Sen. Joni Ernest (R-Iowa) and Rep. Linda Sanchez (D-California). Our moderator was Jean Chatzky, AARP's financial ambassador.

The lawmakers recognize that families in every community and walk of life face caregiving challenges that may last for years. And they pointed out that financial sacrifice is one of these challenges. On average, America's 48 million family caregivers pay more than \$7,200 a year out of their own pockets to help loved ones stay independent, AARP research shows.

That comes to 26 percent of a typical caregiver's income a huge strain on the monthly budget. The financial burden is not shared evenly, however. Hispanic/Latino caregivers spend 47 percent of their income on caregiving on average, and African Americans spend 34 percent.

'Problems are not partisan'

Members of Congress are taking notice. To help ease the financial pressure, Ernst and Sanchez are among the sponsors of the Credit for Caring Act, which would give caregivers a nonrefundable tax credit of up to \$5,000 for costs they incur in their valuable work.

"We are very excited about the opportunity for bipartisanship this has created," Ernst said, adding that she hoped the legislation would get "across the finish line" this year. "We think it is very important to get this legislation done," she said.

Sanchez agreed. "Problems are not partisan," she said. "We have to think about solutions." Sanchez knows firsthand about the realities of caregiving, a commitment she has shared with six of her siblings. "When my father got Alzheimer's, we all took on part of that caregiving burden," she recalled.

Such efforts have traditionally been viewed as a private, family matter. But I believe that America's struggle with COVID-19 has raised awareness of the critical role played by family caregivers.

'Increasing number of medical tasks'

In recent years, family members have been taking on medical and nursing tasks that used to be handled only in a medical facility. These include operating medical equipment, caring for wounds, administering injections and monitoring medications. The pandemic only added to caregivers' responsibilities as they now help loved ones consult with doctors via telehealth visits. Six in 10 caregivers now have medical duties, AARP research shows. In effect, this makes caregivers a new class of health care providers, and it has transformed people's homes into centers of health care.

Proposals to support caregivers have not historically been a high priority for political leaders, but that is starting to change.

As one example, 44 U.S. states and territories have enacted the CARE Act, which establishes certain caregiver rights as public policy. These include requiring hospitals to identify family caregivers in admission records, notify them of discharge plans and provide training on medical tasks they may have to perform.

Credit for Caring Act 2020

This bill allows an eligible caregiver a tax credit of up to \$3,000 for 30% of the cost of long-term care expenses that exceed \$2,000 in a taxable year. The bill defines "eligible caregiver" as an individual who has earned income for the taxable year in excess of \$7,500 and pays or incurs expenses for providing care to a spouse or other depended relative with long-term care needs.

S.1443 - Credit for Caring Act of 2019

The Credit for Caring Act, now pending in Congress, would build on these rights with vital financial support. The nonrefundable tax credit of up to \$5,000 could be used to help with costs for medical management, housing expenses, home modifications, caregiving training or education, and other expenses. It is, as Chatzky pointed out in our discussion, a "common sense, bipartisan solution on the table."

Ernst said that the tax break "puts a big dent" in the annual spending faced by caregivers. "We have so many people that are more aware" of their needs than used to be the case, she said.

Added Sanchez: "The least we can do is try to help families have this extraordinary financial burden."

Can such efforts succeed in today's Congress? Sanchez offered a hopeful thought: "It's a matter of sitting down and listening to each other and finding solutions that are the best fit."

It was inspiring to hear such remarks from leaders on both sides of the aisle. Support for family caregivers is an area tailor-made for that kind of constructive, bipartisan approach.

Find the full article at: [Caregiving Impacts Every Family in All Walks of Life \(aarp.org\)](https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/2020/03/23/caregiving-impacts-every-family-in-all-walks-of-life/)

The Ups and Downs of Caregiving

How to cope with common caregiver emotions.



Which of the following statements ring true for you as a caregiver?

- a. Some days are better than others.
- b. I know my role is valuable, but it can be frustrating at times.
- c. I sometimes feel guilty for having negative emotions about my caregiving role.
- d. All of the above.

If you chose option “d”, you’re not alone. As rewarding as the caregiving role can be, it’s also a tremendous responsibility that comes with highs and lows. The highs can be energizing; the lows can be exhausting. Sometimes it’s easier to bury or dismiss those negative emotions, but it’s important for caregivers to remember that negative thoughts and feelings are normal, valid and important – and need to be dealt with. When you ignore negative emotions, it can lead to problems, with sleep, substance abuse, overeating and even illness, all of which can make caregiving feel harder and less enjoyable.

The Family Caregiver Alliance (FCA) encourages caregivers to express and deal with all their emotions. Of course, that’s easier said than done. It can be difficult to prioritize your own emotions when you’re working hard to take care of someone else. Still, coping with your feelings is important.

You can be proactive about staying on a healthy emotional path by anticipating some of the emotions common to caregivers. While the range of emotions and the ways people experience them can vary, here are a few that the FCA lists among the most common, along with suggested coping mechanisms.

Pay attention to these and other emotions, and you may be in a much better position to take care of yourself – and therefore experience more fulfillment and joy in your incredibly important role as a caregiver!

Emotion	Coping Strategy
<p>Anger – Helping someone on an ongoing basis can be hard, especially if our care recipient is not appreciative or even accepting of the aid you provide. Maintaining control of your emotions can be nearly impossible. Flare ups and feeling like you’re on your last nerve is often part of the territory.</p>	<p>Forgive yourself. “Find constructive ways to express yourself, learn to walk away and give yourself a ‘time out,’” advises the FCA. It’s also healthy to find supportive people who will allow you to vent about what’s triggering your feelings of anger.</p>
<p>Depression – Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness, the inability to experience joy, trouble sleeping, anxiety.... all are symptoms of depression. Caregivers are an at-risk group for depression, so stay mindful about how you’re feeling day-to-day.</p>	<p>Try not to ignore symptoms of depression. This mood disorder needs to be taken seriously. Make an appointment to see your doctor or a mental health professional as soon as you can to develop a plan for dealing with depression, which may include exercise, therapy, and medication.</p>
<p>Fear – The worst-case scenarios and “what ifs” that come with being responsible for another person’s health and well-being can provoke anxiety and downright fear when they start consuming your thoughts.</p>	<p>The FCA recommends having contingency plans in place to lower your anxiety. For example, if you’re worried about what would happen if you had a personal emergency, ask a friend to be your back-up ‘on call’ caregiver. Also, be sure to talk to someone you trust who can offer you a calming perspective on the things that are frightening you.</p>
<p>Guilt – Caregiver guilt is common because of the “shoulds” we inflict on ourselves: We should be doing a better job; we should always love being a caregiver; we should never be impatient or irritable with our care recipient. And on and on...</p>	<p>Forgive yourself and set realistic standards for yourself. Perfection is not the goal. Be proud of yourself for wanting to be an excellent caregiver – and at the same time, give yourself some slack when excellence doesn’t happen.</p>
<p>Jealousy – It’s human nature to look around and feel resentment and envy at people’s circumstances. Caregivers in particular might be jealous of friends who have more daily freedom, or of siblings who live far away and therefore can’t be a part of caregiving responsibilities.</p>	<p>Jealousy happens. Acknowledge and process your feelings. Just try to avoid wallowing in jealous thoughts. Instead, try to focus on what you do have. It can sound cliché but being grateful for what you have can help turn around feelings of envy or lack.</p>

The emotions that come up during caregiving can feel intense and overwhelming at times, but you’re not alone. Look into the coping mechanisms listed and reach out for support when you need to.

Find the full article at: [The Ups and Downs of Caregiving \(uhc.com\)](http://The Ups and Downs of Caregiving (uhc.com))



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.

September's session will be held on Thursday, September 9, 2021, from noon to 1 p.m. Please RSVP (stacey.l.bonner@vanderbilt.edu) for Zoom details by Wednesday, September 8.



LUNCHTIME SESSION

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

Two lunchtime sessions will be held this month:

September 16, 2021: 2 p.m. – 3 p.m.
Join Robin Fountain with Social Security Administration as she discusses Social Security 101 – Everything you wanted to know.

September 23, 2021: 2 p.m. – 3 p.m.
Join Ryan Ramsey with Tennessee State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) as he helps you understand everything about Medicare.

Please RSVP (stacey.l.bonner@vanderbilt.edu) for details by Tuesday, September 15, 2021.



“Be determined to handle any challenge in a way that will make you grow.” – Les Brown