

## Caring For A Loved One From A Distance

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Increasingly it's a fact of life and a challenge for approximately 5 to 7 million Americans: you live miles away from an ailing, vulnerable family member for whom you provide care. The number of adults involved in distance caregiving is expected to double over the next 15 years. Expectations of family members by the Federal government and health care providers that you assure the care recipient's health and welfare will also continue to rise, often at the expense of your career and family.

Here are a few tips to consider.

1. Be sensitive to your loved one's views and attempt to gain his/her full cooperation. This may require more than one conversation to find out what s/he needs and will accept .
2. Take it a step at a time. Begin by honestly identifying what you can and cannot do considering your current responsibilities, strengths and limitations.
3. Learn as much as you can about your loved one's medical, financial, and legal situation. Make a determination about your loved one's ability to remain at home safely.
4. Use a team approach and don't try to go it alone. Involve other family members, neighbors, clergy and friends. Order a local phone book and obtain a list of local services.
5. Identify services that someone else in the community can provide like meal delivery, assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs), transportation, etc.
6. Take care of yourself. Learn how to set limits for yourself and say, "help, yes, and here is a list of what would be helpful. Pick one or two you'd like to do."
7. Get important documents in place like a will, durable power of attorney and a living will or advance directive.
8. Create a notebook where you keep a medical history and medication record
9. Explore your loved one's eligibility for government programs and long-term care insurance benefits.  
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10. Plan on being flexible because conditions change and you need to change your plans accordingly.

It's normal to feel guilty and anxious when you are away from the care recipient but these emotions can also be exhausting. Identify a person you can rely on for objectivity and talk with them often. Plan on regular periods of respite and take time away from your caregiving responsibilities. Taking care of yourself is another way of taking care of your loved one.

Here are some resources for more information:

- ◆ MetLife Mature Market Institute, Resources for Caregivers at [www.maturemarketinstitute.com](http://www.maturemarketinstitute.com).
- ◆ National Family Caregivers Association at [www.nfcacares.org](http://www.nfcacares.org).
- ◆ The John Hartford Foundation, Long-Distance Caregiving at [www.caregiverresource.net/materials.htm](http://www.caregiverresource.net/materials.htm)