

Family Caregiver Health Bulletin



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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

CARING FOR AN AGING PARENT

For many adult children, parents are often the people we have relied on throughout our life. We may have called upon them in times of happiness, joy and celebration, as well as situations where we need help or in times that cause distress and uncertainty. Some adult children even call their parents for a little extra assistance or advice with raising their own children. But with advanced age and chronic illness or disease that may follow, it is not uncommon for familial roles to change. All of a sudden your mom or dad are unable to be there for you in a way that you are used to because they may be struggling to help themselves. You are now in what some people call a "role reversal" situation, where you must care for your parents and help them to rely on you.

Parents are often thought of as people we admire, trust and rely on. We witness them making important decisions and it can therefore be challenging for them to accept that they need your help when their decision-making or ability to remain independent becomes impaired. It can also be difficult to assume a role in

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which you become the person to whom your parents must depend. For example, it is much easier to tell your child to eat than your parent who is refusing.

To guarantee the best care for your parent:

- Make a caregiving plan with your parents and siblings before a plan is needed.
- Communicate with your family — extended and immediate, including your living parents. Talk about your caregiving plan and what you will do in the face of a crisis.
- Be open and honest about your concerns regarding your parent's health and situation.
- Ask for help and assign roles. There are many ways for siblings to provide indirect support from a distance if they are not located near their parents. For example, identify your siblings' strengths, such as finance, primary care, estate planning or medication management.
- Pay attention to your parents and their needs. Help them accept your help and care. Caregiving is a two-way street; be a caregiving team that has mutual trust and respect.
- Do not "parent" your parents.
- Empower your parents versus doing things for them that they can and should do themselves.
- Do not talk or treat your parents as if they are children or keep information from them because you think that they cannot understand.
- Include your parents in the decision-making conversations and processes or at least consult with them before decisions are made regarding their well-being.
- Maintain your own needs and know when to say "no" or ask for help to protect your own priorities.
- Take care of yourself, including taking time for yourself.

All relationships change with time and parent-child relationships are no different. While caring for an aging parent is no easy task, it is important to remember that it is possible to adapt your role as adult child to parental caregiver and have this be a



time and experience in which basic care obligations are met while maintaining mutual respect and honor. This can also be an important time that allows you to spend quality time together and even connect or reconnect to get to know each other in different ways.

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