



Healthy Aging in Neighborhoods of Diversity across the Life Span

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Spotlight on caregiving

By Allison Udris M.S. LCPC

Many people need help from caregivers to stay healthy and safe. Caregivers support people who are elderly, ill, disabled, recovering from trauma or surgery, or have memory problems. Most of the time, caregivers are partners, family members, friends, and neighbors. Some caregivers are hired. Caregiving affects people from all backgrounds. In this article, *care recipients* are people who receive help from caregivers.

Caregivers help people who can't do everything for themselves to stay in their homes

Many care recipients want to be independent. They do not want to leave their homes for a residential care facility. Caregivers make it possible for recipients to stay at home. Some caregivers live with the care recipient to help full-time. Others help the recipient as needed.

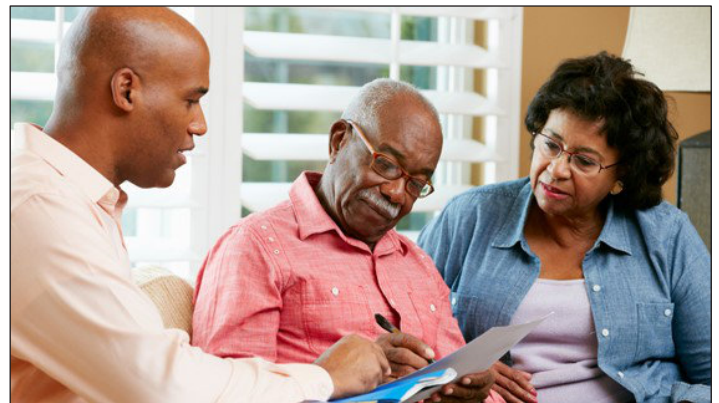
The National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC) and AARP wrote a report called *Caregiving in the U.S.* This report shared some facts about caregiving:

- About 34.2 million Americans gave unpaid care to an adult (50+) in the past year.
- Caregivers spend an average of 24.4 hours per week providing care.
- 53% of care recipients were hospitalized in the past year.
- 22% of caregivers felt their health got worse while caregiving. 40% of caregivers believe their role is very stressful.
- 6 in 10 caregivers work full- or part-time jobs while caregiving.
- 1 in 5 caregivers have financial stress.
- 84% of caregivers want more information on topics such as home safety, behavior management, stress relief, and making health decisions.

What are the roles of a caregiver?

Caregivers may complete household tasks such as shopping, cooking, cleaning, paying bills, and laundry. Caregivers also help the care recipient with hygiene such as bathing, dressing, eating, and toileting. They also give company and emotional support to the recipient.

Caregivers may help care recipients' medical treatment. Caregivers may give medication, watch for side effects,



and report health problems to the recipient's doctor. Caregivers may drive care recipients to medical appointments and pick up prescriptions. Caregivers also talk to medical experts such as doctors, nurses, physical and occupational therapists, and social workers.

Self-care for caregivers

Demands on caregivers can lead to stress, depression, and poor sleep. Caregivers have personal duties such as work and family. These duties cannot always be put "on hold" while helping someone else. It is important for caregivers to practice self-care to prevent burnout and health problems. If caregivers are not caring for themselves, it is hard for them to care for another person.

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Split caregiving tasks. If there are family and friends nearby who can share some of your tasks, ask if they are willing to help. Make a calendar so friends and family can sign up for a day to take the caregiving role. This will give you a chance to rest. If it is not possible to share tasks with someone else, some services can help you. Many grocery stores, pharmacies, and meal services deliver items straight to your door.

Find ways to connect with others. You may have less time to see friends and loved ones while caregiving. Take time each week to connect with people who make you happy. If you can't see them in person, try to call them on the phone or send an email.

Care for your body. Many caregivers are too busy caring for their loved one to think about their own health. However, caregivers often feel stress, anxiety, headaches, joint pain, and sleepiness. You can stay healthy by taking your vitamins and medications, cooking nutritious meals, exercising when possible, getting enough rest, and making yearly medical appointments. Don't use alcohol or drugs to cope with stress, because these cause health problems in the long run.

It is important for caregivers to practice self-care

Cope with stress. Signs of stress include feeling overwhelmed, lonely, and tired. Some caregivers lose interest in activities they used to enjoy. Others become easily bothered by minor things. Caregivers may feel anxiety and depression from the emotional ups-and-downs of caring for someone else. Stress weakens the body's immune system. This puts caregivers at risk for getting sick. Ways to manage stress include meditation, prayer, exercise, hobbies, socializing, and journaling.

Work-life balance. Many caregivers are also working jobs. Ask if your manager can offer a flexible work schedule. Use your lunch break to call home and check on your care recipient. Talk to your Human Resources (HR) department to see if you qualify for benefits under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). This act offers workers unpaid leave for up to 12 weeks without losing their job or health benefits. There are eligibility requirements that HR can explain to you.

Use community resources. Information about meals, transportation, elder abuse, senior centers, home repairs, dental services, and respite services can be found by calling the Baltimore City Health Department at 410-396-CARE or by visiting <https://health.baltimorecity.gov/family-caregiver-resources>.

- Meals on Wheels of Central MD serves Baltimore City and nearby counties with meal programs. The Homebound Meal Delivery Program serves food to people who cannot leave the house due to age, disability, or illness. The Grocery Assistance Program has volunteers who pick up your groceries from the store. You pay for your groceries but there is no delivery charge. For more information on how to apply and join in these programs, call 410-558-0932 or visit <https://www.mealsonwheelsmd.org/>.
- If your care recipient has Medicaid, they may be able to get transportation to medical appointments. Apply and learn more by calling 410-396-7633 or visiting <https://www.mdcrisisconnect.org/search/?id=200900>.

Apply for financial aid. The Baltimore City Health Department's National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) offers services to help families such as counseling, housing improvements, and legal support. The NFCSP offers a non-emergency grant up to \$300 per year to caregivers. This grant helps pay for respite care or extra health services. There are eligibility requirements to participate in this program. You can learn more and apply by calling 410-396-1337 or visiting <https://health.baltimorecity.gov/family-caregivers-program>.

Join a support group. In support groups, people talk about feelings, give advice, and lend a listening ear. These groups also teach coping skills to help you handle your role. If you are not interested in a support group, individual therapy can offer benefits too. Some examples of Baltimore-area support groups are:

Hopkins ElderPlus offers a group for caregivers whose recipients have dementia and other diseases. To learn more about this group, call 410-550-8093.

"Inch by Inch" gives free education and support to stroke survivors and their caregivers. This group takes place at Johns Hopkins Bayview Campus. To learn more about this group, call 410-550-7793.

MedStar Good Samaritan Hospital hosts a caregiver support group through the Center for Successful Aging. Call 443-444-4720 to learn more about this group.

Safety at home

Making changes to the care recipient's home can reduce risks such as injuries or falls. According to the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP, 59% of caregivers use at least one type of assistance for their care recipient, like making changes to the home.

The bathroom and bedroom are the most common rooms that are changed to keep the recipient safe. In the bathroom, caregivers can put grab bars in the shower and by the toilet. Raised toilet seats, non-skid mats, bath seats, and removable shower heads make it easier for the recipient to use the restroom and bathe. Light fixtures without cords, like night lights and ceiling lights, help the care recipient avoid falls.



It is safest to keep the care recipient's bedroom and bathroom on the ground floor. This helps them use the stairs less often. Hospital or special beds can be used at home for this reason. Hallways and stairwells should have handrails to use for balance. Keep canes, walkers, and wheelchairs near the recipient to help them move around the home safely. Many of these items are sold at home medical supply stores, pharmacies, and hardware stores.

Many home medical supply stores offer delivery services to bring items to your home. Many stores have rental options for items like beds, scooters, and wheelchairs. Some home medical supply stores in Baltimore are:

BW Medical Supply
6860 Reisterstown Rd., Baltimore, MD 21215
410-602-7766; <http://www.bwmedicalsupply.com/>

Northern Pharmacy and Medical Equipment
6701 Harford Rd., Baltimore, MD 21234
410-254-2056; <https://www.northernpharmacy.com/>

Comfort Care Medical
405 Frederick Rd. #158A, Catonsville, MD 21228
410-788-1881
or
1105 North Point Blvd. #311, Baltimore, MD 21224
410-282-9660; <https://www.comfortcaremd.com/>

Community participant tracing

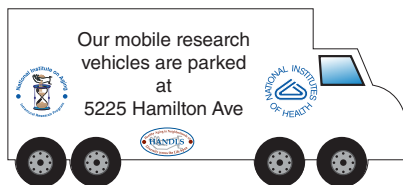
Community outreach is an important part of HANDLS. This outreach helps us stay in contact with you so you will know when it is time for your next examination visit. This is vital to measuring how your health may change over time. We use a variety of methods to assure we have updated contact information for you between your visits. This newsletter is one example and our annual holiday and birthday cards provide us with important information about whether you have moved. If our mailings are returned to us then we need to contact you to update your information. You may also call us anytime with updates. If you move frequently and forget to keep us updated, then our community tracing specialist will try to find you so she can update your contact information.



Nichelle Tyson, Participant Tracing and Tracking Specialist, recently joined HANDLS. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Health Information Management and is pursuing a Master of Science degree in Health Informatics Administration. A lifelong resident of Baltimore, she has good knowledge of Baltimore's neighborhoods. She looks forward to meeting HANDLS participants while working in the community. Outside of work she enjoys studying for school, reading novels for pleasure, and spending time with her family.

If you see her in the community, stop and say hi!

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Newsletter for the HANDLS community

The purpose of this study is to learn about changes in health over time. Using our medical research vehicles, we want to study as many people with different backgrounds as we can. We want this study to help us understand healthy aging by examining the affects of different backgrounds on changes in health over time. The information we gather will help improve health and prevent disabilities. Our goal is to gather information to improve health and prevent disabilities for people of all backgrounds, particularly in minority communities and communities with limited resources.

For information about our study call 877-677-9538 or visit our website <https://handls.nih.gov>.