

Partners in Care

By Lisa M. Petsche

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Time Management Strategies Can Ease Caregiver Burden

Responsibilities of family caregivers typically include chauffeuring, shopping, running errands, paying bills, coordinating medical and other appointments, yard work, home maintenance, housekeeping, preparing meals, managing medication and assisting with personal care. It's easy to become overwhelmed by all of the demands.

There don't seem to be enough hours in the day to get everything done, let alone spend time with other important people (such as a spouse) or devote time to self-care.

If you are a caregiver, read on for practical ways to save time in order to manage the stress inherent in your role.

Get Help

- Accept offers of help.
- If offers of help aren't forthcoming, take the initiative and ask other family members to share the load. Be specific about the kind of assistance you need.
- Investigate available community respite services, such as friendly visiting, adult day care programs and residential facilities that offer short-term care. Also look into volunteer driver programs and accessible transportation services that can free you up from chauffeuring duties. Information on these and other resources can be obtained from the local office on aging.

Hire Help

- Pay for help if you can afford it – for example, a dog walker, housecleaning service, grounds keeping service, handyman or accountant.
- Hire a professional organizer if you're overwhelmed by paper or general clutter.
- If finances permit, hire a companion or personal support worker for your relative so you can regularly get out to a club, class or some other leisure activity. Let loved ones know that a gift certificate to a home healthcare agency or an IOU for respite care would be welcomed for special occasions.

Streamline and Prioritize

- Curb perfectionism. Not everything needs to be done to a high standard; take housework and yard maintenance, for example. Set a time limit for chores if necessary.
- Establish and stick to priorities, so you don't waste time or energy on unimportant things.
- Be flexible about plans and expectations, since your relative's needs and, consequently, your energy level are likely to vary/fluctuate.



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Time Management Strategies (cont.)

Adapt Activities of Daily Living

- If you don't already have one, get an answering machine to screen calls.
- Concentrate home cleaning and tidying efforts on the rooms that are used the most.
- Collect recipes for one-dish meals, such as casseroles, stews, stir fries and main course salads.
- Cook double batches of recipes and freeze half for later use.
- Keep a supply of heat-and-serve entrees in the freezer.
- Buy convenience foods that reduce preparation time: packaged salads, shredded cheese and boneless chicken breasts, for example.
- Order takeout meals periodically; just ensure choices are healthy.
- Arrange with the bank for direct deposit of pension and other checks and automatic withdrawal of regular bills.
- Sign up for telephone banking or Internet banking so you can pay bills, transfer money and check balances from home.
- Shop by mail order whenever possible.
- Take advantage of stores and other services that offer home delivery – for example, grocery stores, drug stores and dry cleaners.
- Research mobile services in your area, such as foot care or phlebotomy (taking blood) if the care receiver requires one or both on a regular basis, dental hygiene services, hairdressing, dog grooming, car washing and detailing, and automobile servicing and repair.
- Keep to-do lists, consolidate errands and avoid peak use times of the day, week and month when visiting stores, banks, government offices and other establishments.