

# Caregivers: How We Help Our Loved Ones

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# Caregiver Defined

- From Merriam Webster dictionary: *“A person who gives help and protection to someone”*
- From the Free Dictionary (an online site): *“An individual, such as a physician, nurse, or social worker, who assists in the identification, prevention, and treatment of an illness or disability”*
- From the American Heart Association: *“The person who holds it all together”*

# You are in good company...

- Estimated 43.5 million adults have provided unpaid care to a loved one in 2015
- 60% caregivers are female
- 85% taking care of a relative (most are caring for a parent at 42%)
- 1 in 10 people are over the age of 75 (average age of caregiver is 49)
- On average, caregivers have been in their role for 4 years

\*\*Obtained by Caregiving in the U.S. 2015 report, funded by The National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC) and the AARP Public Policy Institute

# Time Spent in Caregiving

- On average, 24.4 hours per week
- When caring for a spouse, the number increases to almost 45 hours per week
- Keep in mind many caregivers also have work commitments outside the home!

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# Some more data...

- Almost half of caregivers (49%) feel like they had no choice in taking on their role as caregiver
- Six out of ten caregivers care for an adult with a long term physical (chronic) condition

\*\*Obtained by Caregiving in the U.S. 2015 report, funded by The National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC) and the AARP Public Policy Institute

# Some more data...

- Six out of ten caregivers also assist with medical/nursing tasks, even if they do not have this type of training or background
- Half of caregivers say their loved one was hospitalized within the last year; of those individuals, only half say they were included in discussion of their loved ones' care in the hospital

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# How do we help our loved ones??

- Physical:
  - *Emotional:*
    - Logistical:
      - *Financial:*
        - Existential:
          - *Role shifting:*
            - Social:
              - *Psychological:*

# What do I expect???

- Caregivers may experience feelings of loss
- Changes in the caregiver/patient relationship
- Emotional ups and downs
- Isolation
- Guilt
- Increased sense of meaning and purpose
- **Mixed emotions!!!**

# Caregiver Burnout

- Increased irritation and agitation
- Persistent blame
- Sleep and eating disturbances
- Clinical depression
- Difficulty thinking/processing information
- Feeling overwhelmed all the time
- Physical symptoms (chronic headache, pain, stomach upset)
- Neglecting important facets of your life
- Unhealthy coping mechanisms

# Caregiver Health

- As the caregiver burden increases, or time in caregiving increases, caregiver health declines
- Those caring for a spouse, a person with a mental health problem, or those caregivers performing medical/nursing tasks are more likely to report poor to fair health
- Half of caregivers feel moderate to high physical strain in caring for their loved one
- Sixty three percent of caregivers report moderate to high levels of stress in their day to day lives

# Caregiver Coping: Self Care

- Try prayer, meditation, deep breathing, relaxation
- Eat healthy foods, exercise when you can (alongside your loved one!)
- Seek counseling or professional help
- Be willing to accept offers of help
- Foster and nurture areas outside of your caregiving life (hobbies, other relationships, creativity, etc.)

# Caregiver Coping: Reframing

- Anger directed at a loved one usually is anger regarding a situation, not a person
- Focus on how caregiving is the most important job you will do, rather than the hardest one
- In the midst of caregiving, everything can seem stressful and overwhelming. Remind yourself this is now in the moment and things can and do often get better.

# Caregiver Coping: Journaling

- Focusing on your experience and reflecting can be very powerful and healing
- Allows feelings of frustration, sadness, joy, ambivalence to leave your mind
- Use a paper journal, computer, or create an online blog
- Useful to reflect back on or read for times of encouragement

# Caregiver Coping: Support!!

- Reach out to your support network--i.e. all those friends/neighbors/coworkers who ask if they can do anything to help, let them!!
- Attend local support groups, or start your own
- Online support communities and blogs
- Utilize spiritual support or a faith community
- Regularly see and engage those who are your “confidants”

# Caregiver Help and Resources

- Check out the Central Ohio Area on Aging (COAAA) website: caregiver toolbox, access to support groups, caregiver hotline
- Utilize your hospital social worker or primary doctor's office to discuss resources like home healthcare nurses and aids, home medical equipment
- Call your health insurance provider: many insurances offer coverage for assistance with meals, transportation, lodging costs, etc.

# Caregiver Help and Resources

- Your local church, community center, or senior center
- Local hospital, health department, or healthcare clinic
- For Franklin County Residents: dial 2-1-1 to reach Hands On Central Ohio, or contact COAAA to find out about Senior Options and PASSPORT programs

# A Caregiver's Rights: Some Excerpts

- I have a right to take care of myself. This is not selfish but enables me to help care for my loved one.
- I have a right to protect my individuality and my right to make a life for myself.
- I have a right to reject any attempt to manipulate me through anger, guilt, or depression.
- I have a right to receive consideration, affection, forgiveness, and acceptance from my loved one for as long as I offer these qualities in return

\*\*taken from the American Heart Association