

9 Tips for long distance caregiving

Long distance caregiving can seem a little overwhelming at first, especially when you consider the many forms it can take, including emotional support, helping with finances, hiring in-home help, researching health problems or medicines and trying to keep family and friends updated and informed.

Having to manage a variety of issues from a distance while still taking care of your day-to-day work and family responsibilities can be frustrating. It's helpful to understand the practical considerations of long distance caregiving to make your life a little easier.

- 1. Assess the need**—It's important to get a complete picture of your loved one. The assessment process may involve input from a variety of sources, both informal and formal.
 - A current medical diagnosis and prognosis.
 - An evaluation of the need for assistance with Activities of Daily Living (ADLs), including bathing, dressing, toileting, eating, and transferring from place to place and Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs) including laundry, meal preparation, shopping, managing finances, housekeeping.
 - A cognitive status including memory, judgment and ability to make decisions.

Note: Your program includes access to Professional Care Management Services that provide in-person assessments, recommendations and ongoing care coordination. Call your program for more information.

- 2. Develop a care plan**—The care plan will inform how you create a safe environment, coordinate assistance between unpaid help and paid service providers, manage medication delivery and general physical and mental issues and anticipate future changes that may be required to ensure the continued health and safety of your loved one.



- 3. Mobilize support**—The further you live from your loved one, the more likely it is you will need assistance from family, friends and paid service providers. You could begin with a family meeting, either in-person or virtually, and then inform friends that live nearby. Make a list of specific tasks and potential people to perform them. Ask for help and don't be offended if someone declines, it's important to get someone who wants to help rather than forcing the issue. Sometimes it may be difficult to fill some or all of the needs with informal support and it becomes necessary to find community resources and/or arrange for paid service providers.
- 4. Locate community resources**—Luckily, you are not alone in your caregiving quest and there are a variety of resources available including an online eldercare locator (eldercare.gov), local senior centers, churches, volunteer programs, adult day care, home care, chore & transportation services and meal delivery services.
- 5. Assemble important documents**—It's worth the time it takes to do this when you need something in a hurry. Key documents/information: Date of Birth, Social Security Number, Medicare/Medicaid & Insurance plan cards, Birth certificate, Medical team contact information (i.e., doctors, paid service providers), Privacy release forms, Will, Living will, Financial & health care powers of attorney.
- 6. Plan visits**—Monitor the care situation personally and/or arrange for family members to help. Be sure to socialize with your loved one in addition to checking on other issues like safety, bills, housekeeping, speaking with neighbors who are helping out, etc.
- 7. Anticipate change**—Over time care needs and/or care providers availability may change. It's helpful to develop options and additional care resources that can be implemented when needed.
- 8. Identify alternative plans**—Caregiving may impact your household and job responsibilities. Communication, creativity and flexibility are needed to keep everyone in the loop and maintain balance among your obligations.
- 9. Take time for yourself**—When you're trying to juggle home, work and caregiving it's easy to lose yourself in the mix. Think of self-care as one more ball in the air, you must give it attention or it will fall down. Studies have shown that continual stress has negative effects on the body, weakens the immune system and can cause depression and other ailments. Consider finding a support group, delegating work and finding time to do things you love. Self-care is not selfish; your physical and mental health are as important as everything else you are doing.