

Caring for Health

Resources for Family Caregivers

Care for you
so you can
care for them.

Preparing for hospitalization

Being well prepared for any hospital admission — planned or emergency — can reduce some of the worries it may cause.

Medical history and prescriptions: Keep medical history updated, including contact information for all doctors, as well as current prescription information. This will help the hospital staff to quickly take the needed steps to care for an loved one.

Consent form: Every hospital requires a patient to review and sign a consent form. This consent form lists risks for the recommended treatment or procedure, and permits the hospital to treat the patient. If your loved one isn't able to give informed consent, then another person needs to be chosen to make medical decisions on his or her behalf, such as a family member or friend. This person is usually referred to as a healthcare proxy or agent. Even if someone is chosen as a healthcare proxy, efforts should be made to ask the patient about his or her wishes about treatment.

Discharge planning: If you have a loved one in the hospital, you'll need to look out for their welfare. As soon as his or her condition has stabilized, the hospital begins discharge planning. Different health plans have different rules for how long a patient can be in the hospital for each kind of condition. You'll want to work with a social worker or other hospital staff member to plan for what comes next. If you don't think your loved one is ready to be discharged, you should talk to the doctor, nurse, or someone else who understands the patient's condition and can help.

Discharge planning usually includes:

- Ordering medical equipment (Be sure someone will be home to receive delivery of the equipment.)
- Finding a nursing home or assisted living facility of your choice
- Finding a physical therapy facility for short-term rehabilitation
- Arranging home care or hospice services
- Talking about what may be covered by Medicare and/or other insurance

Returning home: As your loved one gets ready to return home, it's important that you keep working closely with doctors and the other hospital staff.

It's usually not a good idea for patients to leave the hospital if they've not been cleared to do so by a doctor. When a patient signs out of the hospital against medical advice, he or she will not receive a formal discharge from the doctor or any follow-up appointments, discharge orders, or prescriptions for medications.



Caring for parents in your home

As your parents get older, you may be facing some hard decisions like whether they need extra care or help in everyday life. Some adult children turn to assisted living homes. But today, many are choosing to personally care for their parents.

This is an important decision that affects both parents and children and there is much to think about. Aging parents living with adult children may not be right for everyone. However, it may cost less than putting your parents in a nursing home. Nursing homes cost about \$60,000 per year on average. Assisted living facilities cost about \$30,000 per year on average.¹

It may take some time for your family to get used to the new living conditions and the following should be considered:

What is your family's relationship with your parents?

You may get along great with your parents, but adding more people to your home may change things. Before the move, think about these questions:²

- How will the move affect your spouse, your children, and your siblings?
- How will your parents affect your family routine, activities, and privacy?
- Will you expect other family members to help out?
- Should part of your parents' income go toward living expenses?
- Will the move mean you need to change your work hours to provide care?
- Who will provide care for your parents when you go on vacation?
- Are there issues of smoking, drinking, or pets that need to be worked out?
- How do your parents feel about the move?

Can your living space handle your parents?

You'll need to move things around when you move parents into your home and living arrangements may change. Consider building an addition or converting a garage or side porch into a suite.



If your parents don't get around very well, consider the following:³

- Can they reach a bathroom easily?
- Can the bathroom handle a wheelchair or walker?
- Will children have to give up a bedroom to your parents or can a bedroom be shared?
- What needs to be done to make your home parent-friendly? How will you pay for them?

Is your neighborhood a good place for your parents?

Help your parents feel at ease in your neighborhood. Show them how to find the local pharmacy, bank, faith community, recreation center, and other services. If they're looking for things to do, investigate available classes and programs at a nearby senior center.

Consider adult day care centers and companion services, which can provide a break for you.

Are there ways your parents can help out?

Remember that many parents, if they're able, can help make your life easier around the house. Benefits like babysitting, an extra hand cleaning or fixing meals, or even sharing some expenses can lead to a better living space for everybody.

1, 3 <http://healthyliving.msn.com/diseases/caregiving/should-you-move-your-parent-into-your-home-1>

2 <http://www.aarp.org/home-family/caregiving/info-06-2012/caregiving-resource-center-move-parents.html>



Pharmacy Corner

Ideas to help make taking medicines easier

If you're caring for someone who finds it difficult to swallow certain medicines, it's worth it to find out if there are other forms of the medicine that may be easier to take.

For example, certain forms of potassium chloride come as large tablets which are not to be crushed or chewed and may be difficult to swallow; however, this drug is also available in a powder form or effervescent tablets where the medicine is dissolved in water and then ingested.

Some antibiotics also come in other forms including tablet, chewable tablet, capsule, and liquid. If swallowing the medicine is an issue, check with the pharmacist to see if there is a different formulation that could be easier to take by those you care for.

It may also be possible to split or crush the drug to help in creating a smaller size that is easier to swallow. Some drugs, like Focalin, Depakote Sprinkle, Prevacid, and Verelan are examples of drugs which come as capsules, but can be carefully opened and sprinkled on certain foods like pudding or applesauce and then eaten. If this is done, it's important to note that the person taking the medicine must not chew the food mixture, but rather swallow it whole and then drink water to ensure the entire dose has been swallowed. (Keep portions at a mouthful or less to avoid any potential of choking.)

Because some drugs should not be altered from their original form, it is always best to check with your loved one's doctor or pharmacist before splitting. In general, the following types of drugs (list not all inclusive) should not be split or crushed:

- Extended release formulations ("ER" "SR" "XL" "XR" "24 hour" etc.)
- Delayed release formulations
- Medicines which are enteric coated
- Drugs which are designed to dissolve in the mouth/ under the tongue (often called "orally disintegrating" or "sublingual")
- Drugs which contain more than one active ingredient
- Drugs which are considered to be a narrow therapeutic product (e.g. levothyroxine, digoxin, etc.)
- Drugs which crumble into small pieces when handled

Remember, it is always best to check with their personal pharmacist or prescriber before changing the way they take or administer medicines.¹

¹ Splitting information from: Tablet Splitting: To Split or Not to Split. Pharmacist's Letter 2009; 25(5): 250501.



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Humana Hero

Amber's caregiver days started when she was very little. She helped her mom take care of her grandmother, great grandmother and great-great grandmother. "I've been helping my family through their "crisis" situations ever since. My home has always been the place that my family comes to when they need advice, to vent or a place to live."

Lately, she has been caring for her mother and grandfather. "Most days I feel like my 'job' never ends and that I'm going non-stop around the clock. I don't get much help from my other family members, and that can add a lot of stress to me. My husband helps as much as he can, but he can only do so much. However, with all of the stress and emotional struggles that it brings, I wouldn't have it any other way than to be there for my family and be their rock when they need me."

Listening to "a lot" of music and creating scenic photography has helped Amber relax and ease some of the stress she sometimes feels. "If there are too many people at home, I will just get into my car and drive with the music turned up!"