

Caring for Health

Resources for friends and family

November is National Caregivers Month
Humana celebrates all you do!

Fall 2015
Courtesy of Humana

Are you stressed?

Turn the page to find out.

Change your life! Feel the power

Your mother has dementia and has asked you the same question over and over all day: “Where’s Tom?” You start feeling frustrated – and guilty for not being the perfect caregiver you want to be.

One positive way of dealing with this situation is to say, “Tom’s not here right now.” Then distract her by suggesting you start making lunch, folding laundry or doing another simple task together.

Research shows that people who take an active, problem-solving approach to caregiving issues are less likely to feel stressed than those who feel helpless or worry all the time.*

10 ways to take charge

While it can be rewarding, being a family or friend caregiver can be emotionally and physically demanding. You can do things every day to feel more prepared, confident and less stressed.

1. Join a support group of caregivers – make friends, pick up tips – and keep in touch with family members and friends. You won’t feel so lonely.
2. Don’t do it alone. Ask for help. Look for ways to involve others.
3. Take care of your health. Eat right, exercise, get enough sleep, see your doctor.
4. Keep a journal. It can be good therapy and a way to keep your notes and information handy.
5. Anticipate crises and have plans ready.
6. Keep learning through doctors, reading, a support group, etc.



7. Reward yourself, even if it’s only a long walk. Make time each week to do something you want to do, such as going to a movie.
8. Find local programs that may help: transportation, meals, home healthcare services, respite care.
9. Set priorities, make lists and follow a daily routine. Say “No” to taking on more.
10. Try deep breathing exercises or learn relaxation skills.

Feeling empowered

Empowerment is increasing what you know and understand. Reduce caregiver stress by knowing you have power of your own.

You find the facts and resources you need to make good decisions. You know all the options. You believe in yourself and your ability to make changes. You feel good about yourself.

*“Caregiver Stress,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women’s Health, www.womenshealth.gov.

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What's on the menu?

Healthy, enjoyable meals

Eating right isn't an option

The person you care for needs a healthy, balanced diet to help build strength and defenses. You need to maintain your physical and mental health so you can be the best caregiver you can be.

If your loved one won't eat right, you may notice a loss of appetite, change in weight and lack of energy. Talk to him or her about eating better. Then schedule a doctor's visit to make sure there aren't any health issues or dental problems, like dentures that don't fit properly.

What else can you do?

Put healthy meals on the table:

- **Choose foods that promote health:** lots of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, fats like olive oil, and lean sources of protein such as fish, eggs and light-meat chicken
- **Limit fat intake and use less salt,** especially when cooking; check nutrition labels for salt
- **Limit frozen meals** that can contain extra salt, fast foods and alcoholic drinks
- **Include milk** or another food or drink to meet calcium and vitamin D needs
- **Try high-fiber foods** like beans, avocado, whole-wheat pasta and apples; fiber lowers blood sugar and cholesterol, and it helps with digestion
- **Drink plenty of water;** always have a water bottle within reach

Mix things up

Changes can be hard if your loved one has a lifetime of unhealthy eating habits. Make them more fun by learning together. Browse through a new cookbook or an online cooking blog. Talk about your favorite foods and decide which new ones you'd both like to try.

Make small changes at a pace that feels right. Motivate your loved one to change with choices and rewards. Saying no to favorite foods could turn him or her away from the ultimate goal: making healthy choices and feeling better because of them.

Finally, meals usually are more fun when they're shared. Ask friends and family members to come over. This may encourage your loved one to eat better, too.



Stressed?

The warning signs.

Use the following letters to mark each statement below:

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| a. Seldom | d. Usually |
| b. Sometimes | e. Often |
| c. Often | f. Always |

- ☐ 1. I find I can't get enough rest.
- ☐ 2. I don't have enough time for myself.
- ☐ 3. I don't have time to be with other family members or friends besides the person I care for.
- ☐ 4. I feel guilty about my situation.
- ☐ 5. I don't get out much anymore.
- ☐ 6. I have a conflict with the person I care for.
- ☐ 7. I have conflicts with other family members or friends.
- ☐ 8. I have trouble concentrating at work.
- ☐ 9. I cry every day.
- ☐ 10. I worry about having enough money to make ends meet.
- ☐ 11. I'm having trouble meeting deadlines at work.
- ☐ 12. I don't feel I have enough knowledge or experience to give care as well as I would like.
- ☐ 13. My own health isn't good.
- ☐ 14. I don't feel anyone understands what I'm going through.

If your response to one or more statements is "e" or "f," it may be time to begin looking for help with caring for your loved one and taking care of yourself. Go to [Humana.com/learning-center/caregiver](https://www.humana.com/learning-center/caregiver) to find resources that are available to everyone.

Get a flu shot to protect you and your loved ones

It's that time again. Get your flu shot early for a healthier holiday season, when flu cases peak. Make sure the person you care for has one, too.

The flu shot protects against the most common flu strains each season. That's why it's so important to get a new one each year. A shot lowers your chances of getting a severe case of the flu.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests a flu shot for almost everyone 6 months and up. It's very important for people 65 and older and those with health conditions like diabetes and heart or lung disease.

Where to get a flu shot:

- Doctor's office
- Pharmacy
- Retail or urgent care clinic
- Local health department

The flu is a serious disease that spreads easily from person to person. It can make healthy people sick and existing health problems worse. That's especially true for those 65 and older. Getting a flu shot is the single best way to protect yourself and those you care about against the flu, the CDC says.

If you or the person you care for is over 65, ask your doctor whether a pneumonia shot also is needed. There are new guidelines, and doctors now suggest that many people get two types of pneumonia vaccines. So even if you've had a pneumonia vaccine in the past, you may still need another one.



Not catching enough z's?

Sleep study may help

When you care for a loved one, you know eating right and exercising are important. Don't forget about how he or she is sleeping – not getting enough sleep can decrease well-being.

The person may suffer from obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) if he or she wakes up often in the night, snores loudly, gasps for air while asleep or has frequent headaches in the morning.

OSA occurs when the tongue and throat muscles relax while you're sleeping. This creates an obstruction, blocking airflow and causing breathing to slow or even stop.

"Every time you start to get deep, restful sleep, it's as if someone shakes you a bit," says Paul Abbott, director, Humana Clinical Best Practices. "Your brain is kicking you up to a lighter stage of sleep so you'll re-engage and start breathing again."

A sleep study will let you know if your loved one has OSA. It can be done in the home using a small machine that tracks oxygen levels, airflow and heart rate, or at an overnight sleep clinic.

An in-home sleep test can be shipped directly to you. This makes it more convenient for you and more comfortable for your loved one. A home sleep study also can be more accurate.

"If you're in your home, the study can more accurately capture your normal night's sleep compared to if you go to a facility," Abbott says.

If your loved one has two or more of the risk factors below, visit [Humana.com/SleepHealth](https://www.humana.com/SleepHealth) to take a short quiz. It'll help you decide whether to talk to the doctor about an in-home sleep study:

- Family history of OSA
- High blood pressure
- Smoker
- Male
- Over 40
- Overweight
- Large neck size (17 inches or more in men; 16 inches or more in women)
- Small airways in your nose, throat and mouth
- Enlarged tonsils



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We want to hear from you!

Email us at **Family_Friends@Humana.com** and let us know what topics about caring for loved ones or friends you'd like to see addressed in this newsletter.



“We (caregivers) can't be everything we need to be for them if we aren't eating or sleeping properly, or taking some down time now and then.”

Humana hero: Lisa Cain

Lisa Cain and her husband recently celebrated a huge milestone: After three years, Brian was still cancer-free after being diagnosed and treated for stage 4 head/neck cancer in 2012. That was his first fight with cancer; he got a clean bill of health a few weeks after surgery for early stage kidney cancer in 2013.

“I was his primary caregiver both times, which involved a unique level of strength, love and support,” Lisa says. “I learned so much about myself through the process, and our relationship is stronger because we lived and fought through those experiences together. He's my hero. I'm thankful every day that he chose to fight to be here.”

Lisa helps other caregivers as leader of Humana's Caregiver Network Resource Group. One suggestion to them is to take care of themselves. “It's often easier to focus all our attention on our loved ones' needs because we care about them so much. But we can't be everything we need to be for them if we aren't eating or sleeping properly, or taking some down time now and then.”