Your Source campaign – May 2014

Caregiving

Strive for Balance in Caregiving

Caring for a loved one can be rewarding, but also stressful and exhausting. It can be a daily challenge to balance caring for your loved one with your other family and work responsibilities.

Millions of Americans provide caregiving support to family members who are elderly or have chronic illnesses or disabilities. These individuals often need help with daily activities such as meals, dressing, bathing, and taking medications. But it's often hard to balance a full set of caregiving responsibilities with everything else in the caregiver's life. Many caregivers today are "sandwiched" by caring for both an elderly relative and the caregiver's own children in the home.

If you're a caregiver, you might at times be so focused on the well-being of the person for whom you're caring that you forget about your own needs. It's easy to get overwhelmed sometimes, and the stress can cause illness, anxiety, depression and burnout.

In this edition of *Your Source*, we look at caregiving coping strategies, including:

- Ways to attain better balance between your caregiving role and the rest of your life.
- The importance of taking care of your own health and well-being.
- Helpful resources and information that can lighten your caregiving load.

Log on and learn! Access *Caregiving* on the Magellan member website under the Library/In the Spotlight section. There you'll find ideas on how to better take care of yourself and your loved ones.

Ways to Attain Balance

As a caregiver you might feel pulled in many directions. Meeting everyone's needs simultaneously isn't always easy. Here are some tips on finding balance.

- ***Talk about roles up front***. Good communication within the family, including children, is important. By discussing caregiving issues early on, everyone will be clearer about what is expected of him or her in terms of ongoing caregiving responsibilities.
- ***Stay flexible***. Expect care arrangements to change. Some individuals in the family may become more willing to take on certain caregiving tasks over time. Examples could include driving to the doctor, grocery shopping or preparing meals.

- ***Ask for help***. Don't think you need to handle everything alone. Friends, family, and outside professionals and agencies can help. Ask them!
- ***Schedule healthy breaks***. Maybe you need a half hour walk each day, or a weekly outing to the movies or dinner with a friend. Maybe you just need some quiet personal time, even for a short period. Schedule it!
- ***Arrange needed time off***. Respite care (in-home or at a center) can give you much-needed time off by providing skilled caregiving coverage.

Remember to Focus on You, Too

Sometimes caregiving responsibilities appear in our lives gradually, as a loved one's needs increase over time. Or, those needs can impact us all at once, requiring that we make rapid changes. Regardless of where you are in the caregiving journey, it's important to take good care of yourself first.

Look After Your Health

There are some basic steps you can take in order to stay strong as a caregiver. First, always strive to get seven or eight hours of sleep per night. Also, eat a healthy diet that's rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Limit your intake of alcohol and nicotine. In addition, set aside at least a little time for a workout that suits your lifestyle—whether it's walking, weightlifting, running, water aerobics, bike riding—or whatever helps you stay active and beat stress. Set up some brief caregiving coverage if needed and don't skip periodic health checkups with your doctor.

Maintain Supportive Relationships with Family and Friends

Though you may be busy with caregiving tasks, don't isolate yourself. Be sure to share your challenges with friends and family. This can help you be a more relaxed caregiver and prevent you from "burning out."

Be Realistic in What You Can Do

Try to focus on the positive good you're doing, and don't give in to guilt. No one is a perfect caregiver! You're doing the best you can. Make sure you ask for help whenever possible, and don't worry about having to say "no" to outside requests that don't fit your priorities.

Watch for Signs of Stress

Sometimes you're so involved in caring for a loved one that you miss the warning signs of your own stress. This could be trouble sleeping, being angry, irritable, and/or overtired, eating poorly, or losing interest in activities. Your program offers support and resources that can help.

Now That's An Idea!

Tips for Getting Caregiving Help

Ask family and friends. Prepare a list of ways friends and family could help you, and let them choose their tasks.

Consider respite care. This can include home health care workers, adult daycare centers, and assisted living or short-term nursing homes.

Learn about community resources. Check out your local senior center, place of worship or hospital to find out what's available.

Look into support groups. A local or online support group can give you caregiving tips from others who are facing the same challenges you are.

Consider using a housekeeper. This can free up your time to tend to other priorities.

Use a monitoring device. If needed, a mobility monitor, in-home webcam or emergency response system can help you keep track of your loved one.

Tap caregiver resources and information. Helpful groups include the Family Caregiver Alliance (www.caregiver.org) and the National Alliance for Caregiving (www.caregiving.org).

Poster

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Your program offers ideas and resources that can help in your caregiving journey.