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Caregiving and Work, Creating a Balance

Most elders who have dementia and other serious medical problems are cared for by loved ones at home. This is the preferred option for most of us as we age, and for many families it's the only realistic choice due to the high cost of out of home care. Typically, those providing care are spouses or partners, adult children and other family members.

What does it mean to be a caregiver?

Sometimes it means providing care to someone living with you. It can also include care provided by someone living close by or even from a long distance. Caregiving includes such tasks as personal care, house cleaning, meal preparation, transportation, handling finances, managing medications, coordinating services, and communicating with health care professionals.



It goes without saying that caregiving is time consuming and saps emotional energy. Since more than half of all caregivers also need an income and work outside the home, this means caregiving often involves a stressful tension between work and home responsibilities. This article provides some tips and guidance for how to create a better balance.

Work-Life Balance

Our work life balance shifts throughout our life cycle. At times, we need to make accommodations in our personal life; for instance, when starting a new job or taking on a

demanding new work project. Naturally there are also times when we need to make accommodations in our work lives due to needs in our personal lives. A balance doesn't always mean equal time or attention to both.

At Work:

When someone is a caregiver, flexibility at work and support from one's employer are godsend. Fortunately, many employers are understanding and offer help in the form of work flexibility and time off.

Know and Use Your Benefits and FMLA

It's good to review your employee handbook to become informed about the policies and related benefits, and then have a conversation with your supervisor and/or Human Resources manager.

For many workers, the federal Family Medical Leave

Act (FMLA) applies. This law mandates that employers offer up to 12 weeks of unpaid time off with the guarantee that your job will be preserved and health insurance coverage will continue during this time period. FMLA applies to any workplace organization that has 50 or more employees and if an employee has worked at their job for 12 months and for more than 1250 hours.

However, many people cannot afford to take unpaid leave and often caregiving responsibilities extend beyond a few months. Some employers offer other benefits which can help in this situation, such as the option to telecommute

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from home, flexible work hours, use of sick and vacation time for caregiving, and shared leave programs where employees donate vacation time hours. These benefits can help someone buy time for long term planning and can also be a component of the care plan.

Talk with your Manager and Co-workers

Talking with your supervisor about your needs as a caregiver can lead to helpful solutions and more understanding. Most employers want to be supportive, especially when an employee is committed and works hard.

Sharing that you are a caregiver with co-workers can also lead to understanding and support. And, by the way, this is a good time to say “no” to extra hours and projects at work, knowing that this is something you can do again in the future.

Use Time Wisely

An important tip is to be as organized as possible both at work and at home, especially with time. As examples, use a lunch hour to search for information on resources or schedule medical appointments at the beginning or end of a work day to minimize time off.

On the Home Front:

When providing care, we need to be realistic about our capacity and ask for help. It's also a good time to let go of the small stuff and our usual standards. There are times when dirty dishes in the sink or an unmade bed are signs of good coping!

Create a Care Team

After making a list of tasks related to caregiving (everything

from meal prep to doctors' appointments to finances), ask others in your intimate circle for help. Assigning specific tasks to others helps lighten the load. Providing updates to family and friends makes it easier to ask for help when this is needed.

Relatives who live close by can help with medical appointments, social contact, meals, and can also be assigned specific tasks. Others who live far away can still help with tasks such as finances, service coordination, emotional support, and scheduled visits to relieve a family member providing day to day care.

Consider using professional care

At some point, paid in-home care services may be needed. Many home care companies provide high quality services. Elder care social workers can help find the right service. Area Agencies on Aging in most states offer free assistance with locating services and programs and often have volunteer programs for needs such as companionship and transportation. Another helpful service is Adult Day Programs.

Self-Care:

While caregiving can be deeply rewarding, it is challenging work and we need to take care of ourselves while doing so. This is not selfish, it is essential to providing good care. Self-care means something different to each us. Here are some examples:

- Attend a support group.
- Schedule time to talk with a supportive friend.
- Set aside time for a pleasant activity such as a doing a craft, sports, a manicure, going to a movie or reading a book.
- Do what we can to get enough sleep and eat healthy meals.
- Exercise

EAP CAN HELP

A call to EAP can lead to supportive counseling for how to cope and take care, and it can save time by helping with research and information on resources. We are happy to help!

RESOURCES

AARP. (2012, January). Tips for working caregivers. Retrieved from <https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/life-balance/info-2017/tips-for-working-caregivers.html>

WebMD. (Retrieved 2018, November). How to balance work and caregiving. Retrieved from <https://www.webmd.com/healthy-aging/caregiver-balance-work#1>



EAP SERVICES

EAP is here to help. For more information about articles in this newsletter, or any other EAP-related topic, please call one of our trained counselors at our toll-free number:

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