

Caregiving: It Takes A Village

As the baby boomer generation grows older, we are facing increasing challenges when it comes to taking care of our older loved ones, particularly given the costs of senior living options. More and more people are becoming caregivers; [an estimated 34 million adults have served as unpaid caregivers to someone age 50 or older in the previous 12 months.](#)

[Caregiving may bring with it many stresses](#), including an increased risk for serious physical health issues, anxiety, depression, lower quality of life, and harmful behaviors like substance abuse.

However, [research has shown that when caregivers seek support and don't just go at it alone, these risks are at least partially alleviated.](#) This month, we asked some local experts how caregivers can find supports in their community and build self-care into their daily lives.

First, Care for Yourself

Don't forget yourself in the process of caring for someone else. Hilary Dolinger, Outreach Coordinator at [Weinberg Campus](#), advises that when you prioritize your own health, you'll be a better caregiver in the long run. Make sure to sleep, eat regular meals, get regular exercise, and have backup care plans in case something comes up in your personal life.

Know the Resources Available to You

You are not alone when you become a caregiver; there are many formal resources available to you. Make sure you know what's out there—finding supports can improve the quality of life for both you and your loved one. The following resources are available to you through EAP; you can check them out online and call



us at (800)888-4162 to complete an assessment and referral. As a benefit of your referral through EAP, we'll follow you through the referral process and make sure your needs are fully met.

[Erie County Senior Services](#) is an incredible resource for caregivers and the elderly alike; check out their [Caregiving page](#) for information on adult day care programs, caregiver support groups and counseling, home safety assessments, and respite workers.

[WNY Alzheimer's Association](#) helps caregivers "careplan" for a safe household, understand different elements of their loved one's disease, and plan for the future of their loved one's care.

When family caregivers disagree about what is best for older loved ones, [EAP](#) can help. Elder Mediation Services are available to help families resolve disagreements about caregiving arrangements so that matters don't escalate to become legal issues.

Reach Out To Your Community

Julia Szprygada, Director of Education and Training at the [Alzheimer's Association of WNY](#), recommends that you supplement official supports with friends and family members in your community. "Don't hesitate to delegate tasks to willing people in your church, your family, and your friends group," she says. "Try and keep your requests specific: can you visit on Monday? Can you bring dinner on Friday? If your loved one's friends are mobile, ask them to take your loved one out and enjoy some social time away from home."

Caregiving Checklist

Before you commit to becoming a caregiver, set yourself up for success by doing the following:

- ❑ **Define Expectations:** Make sure that you and your loved one are on the same page in terms of how living arrangements and support will occur.
- ❑ **Set Priorities:** List your loved one's daily needs and make a plan as to how they will be fulfilled.
- ❑ **Inventory Important Records:** Know where all essential documents and passwords are, including bank and retirement accounts, investments, safe deposit boxes, will and trusts, and medical information.