



*Senior Care*  
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# Five Common Mistakes **Caregivers Make**

(and how to keep from making them)

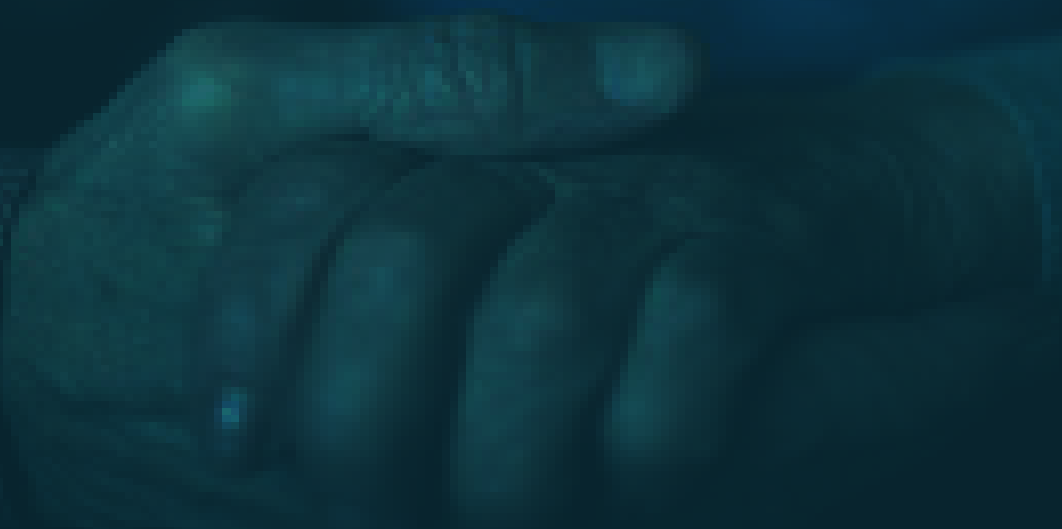


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Caregiving duties seem to creep up on us. We may start to notice subtle changes in an aging parent, spouse or other senior family member. But often times, it's a lot easier to ignore the signs because who has time to take on caregiving responsibilities? And besides, it seems a little scary and who knows what to do anyway?

Here are five common mistakes caregivers can make; with some ideas on how to prevent them from happening in the first place.

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# Failing to make a plan

A plan doesn't have to be elaborate, but putting a few action steps in place will certainly provide a sense of stability. Let's say we're talking about your aging parents or another senior family member. Asking a few initial questions will help jump start the conversation.

- Does the senior want to stay in their home? Is it feasible?
- If so, is the home safe? If not, what can be done to improve safety?
- Is housekeeping a problem?
- Has yardwork become difficult?
- Is mail piling up? Are the bills getting paid?

Getting the answers will help determine the steps you'll need to take. And now... you have started your Plan.



## Forgetting to Ask for Help Soon Enough

Caregiving carries its own stress; but actually providing it (which can be in so many different forms) can easily become a heavy burden. The key to helping decrease the chance of burnout due to caregiving stress, is to find people in the beginning (e.g., family, friends) to help lighten the load.

- If you don't live close, (and there are no siblings nearby) ask a friend if he/she is willing to check on the senior.
- If your siblings live near the aging parent, split up the routine responsibilities; take turns for dealing with emergencies.
- Make sure the aging parent(s) or other senior gets a phone call every day or two. You might learn something, and get ahead of any issues/problems.
- Hire a yard service and/or a housekeeping service. (If there are other siblings, split the costs if needed).

### 3

## Neglecting to Have a 'Backup' Plan

You think you have things pretty much under control. After all, you set up some home care, an/or weekly housekeeping; and while you're away on a business trip for a few days, your friend said she would check in on your parents. However, you get a call that your friend is ill. Now what do you do? A back up plan will reduce the possibility of you having a "melt down."

- With no other family in town, find two friends who would be willing to help in an emergency (hopefully one of them is available on short notice).
- Interview 2-3 non-medical Home Care Agencies – find one you like before you need one. In the event of an emergency, you can call to get temporary, short term help.
- Interview 1-2 Geriatric Care Managers (Aging Life Care Expert) who, among other functions, can direct support services and community-based services; and coordinate healthcare. [www.aginglifecare.org](http://www.aginglifecare.org)

# 4

## Not Scheduling Enough Breaks

The most difficult thing to do is to take some time off, especially if you are the main caregiver. Whether you live in the same town, or in another State, you pretty much constantly think about the senior(s) you're caring for. Caregiver burnout is a real condition. To help prevent burnout, set a priority of taking intermittent breaks. They likely won't be often enough, but any break will be like a "breath of fresh air."

- Schedule the break(s) in your monthly calendar: coffee with a friend; play some golf; go for a walk; head to the Mall.
- Ask a friend or family member to be the "go to" person while you're "off the clock."
- Many employers offer family leave; some even provide reimbursement for short-term outside caregivers. Ask about taking a day off, or part of a day, in order to renew your strength/stamina.
- Check out the availability of 'respite care' in your area. For example, many assisted living communities offer short term respite care for seniors. Visit a few ahead of time to find just the one that would work for your loved one.
- Support Groups can be so encouraging and helpful. Take some time to locate one that meets your caregiving needs as you care for a loved one with a specific disease such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, cancer, stroke.



# 5

## Haven't Connected with the Senior's Doctor

As previously discussed, there are so many things to think about when stepping in to fulfill more caregiving responsibilities for aging parents, spouse or other senior family member. One that tends to get overlooked is communicating with the senior's primary care physician. When any physical or mental changes are observed in the senior, staying in touch with the senior's doctor will be 'key'. Things to consider:

- The senior can give permission for the doctor and staff to discuss medical information with you.
- When possible, you, the main caregiver, or another family member should accompany the senior to see any doctor so that there are a "second set of eyes and ears."
- It may be of value for you to pay 'out of pocket' for a personal visit with the doctor to discuss the senior and any concerns/questions.
- As a caregiver, you may notice unusual behavior or other side effects from medications or other circumstances. It's essential to be in contact with the senior's primary doctor.
- Communication with the doctor will help you be more informed when you have interaction with the senior you're caring for.

## ***How to Keep from Making Common Mistakes that Caregivers Often Make?***

- Make a Plan
- Ask for Help
- Set up a 'Back-up' Plan
- Schedule Breaks
- Connect with the Senior's Doctor

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