



Health Awareness

Ways to Be Your Own Best Caregiver

(NAPSA)—How much does America care? According to a recent study conducted by the National Alliance for Caregiving, in collaboration with the AARP, and funded by MetLife Foundation, there are more than 44.4 million people in the United States—21 percent of the population—providing unpaid care to another adult. Most of those receiving care are aged 50 or older, many of them suffering from Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, and require an average of 21 hours of care per week. With fully 59 percent of these caregivers working full time, the strain of being a caregiver results in less time spent with friends and other family members, less frequent social activity, and greater stress.

"The study reveals that those who carry the heaviest responsibilities are most vulnerable to risks associated with poorer health, emotional stress, and economic hardship," said Sibyl Jacobson, President of the MetLife Foundation. "What's more, as the Baby Boom generation ages over the next 25 years, the ranks of those needing care will swell."

Although aging is inevitably a fact of life, by adopting a lifestyle rooted in good nutrition, fitness, social involvement, and continued learning, it is possible to attain a healthy lifestyle, and ensure that the only caregiver you'll need for most of your adult life is yourself.

Tips for Family Caregivers

- Reward yourself often with breaks.
- Watch out for signs of depression.
- Don't do it all yourself. Accept offers of help.
- Educate yourself about your loved one's condition.
- Be open to opportunities to enhance your loved one's independence.
- Take care of your back: caregivers do a lot of heavy lifting.
- Seek out support from other caregivers.
- Think about the future, and dream new dreams.

Source: National Family Caregivers Association

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www.thefamilycaregiver.org



It's never too early or late to get started. Steps that anyone can take on the road to a healthier lifestyle include:

• **Put healthy eating on the menu.** Eating a well-balanced diet, rich in fruits and vegetables, is wise at any age. Vegetables have been proven to help prevent disease and contribute to overall wellness.

• **Give your mind a workout.** Reading, listening to music, doing crossword puzzles, and talking to people who challenge you can lead to greater mental alertness and greater independence in later life.

• **Get moving.** By staying fit, you're better able to perform daily routines, improve balance, and live an independent lifestyle.

• **Learn to cope with stress.** Over time, stress can lead to heart disease, ulcers, memory loss, and immunity deficiencies. Lessen your stress level through laughter, deep breathing, and exercise.

• **Practice preventative medicine.** Screening and early detection tools can help health professionals identify health problems and life-threatening diseases early on.

• **Stay socially connected.** Older adults who socialize have less stress and stronger immune systems.

• **Prepare for retirement—and enjoy it!** Preparing financially for retirement can be key to pursuing interests in later life. Most people underestimate how much they'll need to maintain their standard of living in retirement—on average, 70 percent of your pre-retirement income during peak years.

For other tips, MetLife offers a free brochure, titled "About Healthy Aging," which is available by calling 1-877-MY-AGING (1-877-692-4464). For information about MetLife Foundation, visit www.metlife.org; information about the National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC) can be found at www.caregiving.org.