



spotlight on health

Tips For Caregivers Of Loved Ones With Chronic Conditions

(NAPS)—Whether they're helping out with daily activities, administering medication or just lending an ear to listen, caregivers of people with chronic conditions are often unsung heroes for those living with a disease.

There are thought to be more than 44 million caregivers in the U.S., providing an estimated value of \$257 billion of free care annually, according to the National Alliance for Caregiving and the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). And like their loved ones who have chronic conditions, many of these caregivers also live with the problems and challenges that the diseases present.

Fortunately, there are ways to make caregiving easier. Caregivers Brittney R. and Duane D., who care for loved ones with multiple sclerosis (MS), are part of the MS LifeLines® hands-on support network and educational community for MS patients and caregivers, sponsored by EMD Serono and Pfizer Inc. Each serves as an MS LifeLines Ambassador and shares tips for caregivers of people living with a chronic condition such as multiple sclerosis:

Take Advantage of Support Networks and Educational Communities

- With the recent rise in online educational communities for chronic diseases, it has become increasingly convenient for caregivers to access information they need from the privacy of their own homes. For people with MS, MSLifeLines.com/caregiver offers caregivers the opportunity to speak live with other caregivers via the Peer Connection program, access the MS in Balance Web events and



Brittney R. helps her mother, Shiela R., living with multiple sclerosis since 2002, bake a cake for a special occasion.

firsthand testimonials, as well as a variety of other resources that are available to help caregivers manage stress, learn new tips and connect with others. The resources available at the site proved useful for Duane, who cares for his wife Christy who has MS.

"The Web site helps me to stay attuned to what my wife is going through as a person living with MS, which can be hard to fully comprehend," Duane says.

Seek Community Support Groups

- Contact a local chapter of a nonprofit organization that supports patients with a chronic disease to find out what patient support services are available and to potentially meet other caregivers.

- Gather information about your loved one's disease. It can help take away the fear of the unknown and help you better relate with the person for whom you're caring.

Stay Organized

- Create a calendar that includes doctor appointments, med-

ication schedules and other important points to remember. If you use a PDA, you may want to consider storing the calendar on your device.

- Have a quick go-to list of emergency contact numbers that you can access at a moment's notice. This will help you stay calm and in control should a situation arise.

- Talk with doctors and make sure you know how to reach them at all times. Also, keep the phone number for a 24-hour help line near the phone. People with MS and their caregivers can reach trained specialists from MS LifeLines at (877) 447-3243.

Open Lines of Communication

- It's important for caregivers and those they care for to understand what is going on in each other's lives and to be supportive.

- Gauge the preferred independence level of your loved one. Just because individuals are living with a chronic condition does not mean they cannot or don't prefer to do things for themselves.

"It is important to communicate with the person you are caring for," says Brittney, whose mother, Shiela R., has MS and is also an MS LifeLines Ambassador. "My mother's independence is very important to her, and keeping the lines of honest communication open allows me to understand what she can or cannot do on her own, and be as helpful as possible."

Make Time For You

- Maintaining a healthy life balance helps you provide the best possible care to your loved one and to yourself.

For more information, visit www.MSLifeLines.com/caregiver or call (877) 447-3243.