

Tips For Giving Back: Easing The Strain Of Caregivers

(NAPSA)—Caring for a family member with a serious illness can be a physically and emotionally draining experience. According to the 2002 fact sheet “Family Caregiving” from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Aging, more than 22 million American households are involved in caregiving for someone age 50 or above. The demands of taking care of someone sick, especially when there are other roles to play, such as parent or spouse, can wear on a caregiver.

This strain can lead to negative health effects. In their 2003 study, “Chronic Stress and Age-Related Increases in the Proinflammatory Cytokine IL-6,” researchers at Ohio State University found that adults caring for a spouse with Alzheimer’s disease or another form of dementia showed an increase in the levels of a protein that helps fight disease by stimulating the immune system. The stress of caring for the patients caused the levels of the protein to rise to harmful levels. The study also showed that these caregivers experienced increased levels of depression.

“Because of the time and commitment it takes to care for a family member, caregivers often neglect to take care of themselves,” says Lorie Davidson, an agent in Cedar Falls, Iowa, with Bankers Life and Casualty Company. “It’s important for caregivers to find balance in their own lives in order to continue helping someone else with theirs while still remaining healthy.”

Davidson has made the care of seniors her mission in life, making it more than just a job. In addition



to looking out for seniors, she recognizes the importance of caregivers who devote endless time and energy to ensure seniors are given the respect and independence they deserve.

In recognition of National Family Caregivers Month this November, Davidson provides the following ideas on how to honor caregivers and help them find the balance they need:

- Treat a caregiver to a manicure, massage, haircut or other relaxing pleasure with a gift certificate. Since many caregivers are so focused on someone else’s physical needs and get out of the habit of doing special things for themselves, they may need to be prompted.

- Create a certificate of appreciation for a family caregiver, and have the care recipient fill it out if possible. A simple recognition of the time and effort put forth is enough to make a caregiver feel appreciated.

- Start a support group for family caregivers or suggest that the caregiver you know utilize the online support groups now available, which eliminates the burden of finding even more time in an already overfilled day.

- Let the caregiver you know take some time off, while you sit with the caregiver’s loved one. Just getting away from the situation that a caregiver is in all day can be rejuvenating. Make this time a standing appointment on a weekly or monthly basis. That will give the caregiver something to look forward to.

- While out running your own errands, surprise a caregiver by simultaneously taking care of some of his or hers. Or call in advance to ask what he/she needs while you’re out.

- Assist a caregiver with any projects that he/she has not been able to get to around the house. Caregivers often must put these things aside to make time for their loved one.

As the baby boomer generation steps into its senior years, caregiving households will increase in number. According to the June 1997 report, “Family Caregiving in the U.S.: Findings From a National Survey” by the National Alliance for Caregiving and the American Association of Retired Persons, the number of caregiving households in the U.S. for people aged 50+ could reach 39 million by the year 2007.

If you are a caregiver, something as simple as talking with someone who knows what you’re going through can be of tremendous assistance. If you need help, call the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Aging toll free at 1-800-677-1116 or visit them online at www.eldercare.gov. To reach a Bankers agent in your area, call 1-800-231-9150 or go to www.bankers.com.