



## Caregiver's Answers, Topics, and Helpful Information

In an effort to continually assist caregivers in their search for pertinent information regarding eldercare, our Family Caregiver Support Coordinator addresses topics of most frequently asked questions via **Caregiver's Answers, Topics and Helpful Information (CATHI)**. Additionally, caregivers are also invited to e-mail individual questions to the Family Caregiver Support Coordinator at [caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org](mailto:caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org).

### **Spring Cleaning: How to Refresh Your Caregiving Routine**

It is human tendency to get stuck in our ways as we carry out life's demands, and caregiving is no exception. But the routines we fall routine to could often use some improvements as time passes and new factors arise. With spring upon us, it is a good time to take a fresh look at our care plans to see if there are areas that need tweaking or at least a fresh twist.

#### **Analyzing Your Care Plan**

Making a pro/con list of what is working and what is not is an effective method of examining any goal, from budgeting to weight loss. It can be just as effective for improving one's care plan. Below is a template for a hypothetical caregiver we will call Sarah. If you are up for a little self-reflection, Sarah's list could help you refresh your caregiving routine and jumpstart your own self-improvement.

#### **First, Sarah Writes about what is working well in her caregiving routine:**

- I found a wonderful assisted living facility (ALF) for mom near my home, this has allowed me to enjoy more time with other family members and friends.
- It took a while, but mom adjusted to her new life and now enjoys her own friends and the activities the facility provides.
- Mom also feels safe, which is important to both of us. Knowing she has professional caregivers around allows me to relax at work and not worry so much.

- I have developed a good system for Mom's needs that integrates with my other errands. This has saved me a lot of time.

**Then, Sarah writes about her daily challenges and the problematic aspects of her care plan:**

- I keep correcting mom when we are talking. I am told that, because of her Alzheimer's, arguing is counterproductive and I should agree with her statements no matter how outlandish they seem. Of course, there are some exceptions, but those times are rare.
- I am angry with my brother because he has not taken the time to travel to see mom. She sometimes does not recognize him, and forgets that he even visited, but I still feel that he should visit anyway.
- I have been happy that mom is content that I have not followed her doctor's advice. He has advised that I should take time to learn about the stages of Alzheimer's and that I should research possible changes in her care needs.
- I have been putting off making appointments for my own physical, mammogram, and other routine medical tests because mom has so many of her own appointments. Those take time, and I get tired of sitting in the clinics. I think mine can wait.

**Reflect on Your Lists**

Once you have made your lists, it is important to take time to reflect on both of the list. You have likely worked hard to get to this place in your life and you deserve credit for all that you have done. It is important to acknowledge everything you have done right. Caregiving takes a great deal of research, patience, effort, time and trial and error. You have made big strides even though it is overwhelming at times. Remember to give yourself a pat on the back.

The next step is to analyze your list of caregiving problems and setbacks to see if you can make changes that will improve your life and your loved ones. Whether your problem list is big or small, do not be intimidated. It will take work, but the goal here is to find solutions to these issues one at a time. This exercise should relieve stress and simplify your life, not cause you to feel burdened.

**Finding Caregiving Solutions**

Using Sarah's list above, I devised some solutions that could help fix these hypothetical issues for her and others. Writing down your ideas as you brainstorm, this will help you remember and track your progress through the list. Even if you can't see all of these solutions now, you will have a game plan already prepared for when you have a bit of free time to tackle the next issue.

**Refresh #1: I keep correcting Mom when we are talking.**

Admittedly, it is hard to listen to your loved one that you once admired for their wisdom, now make bizarre statements. Our initial reflex is to correct them, which tends to make matters worse. You may feel that “lying” to a loved one with dementia is wrong. You may even think that agreeing with them when they are wrong is condescending. This can be a conflicting situation that a lot of dementia caregivers experience, but the answer lies in changing your thought process and approach.

Accept the wisdom of those who have studied the disease. They will tell you that when you validate your loved on, you are showing compassion, not patronizing them. Conversely, arguing only increases the person’s agitation and decreases their self-esteem. Your loved one is living in an unchangeable reality that is different from yours but that is just as real to them. You are the well person, so it is up to you to try and share in your loved one’s version or reality and help them accept it and work through it. When you adapt to this way of thinking, life will be a little easier for both of you.

**Refresh #2: I am angry at my brother’s lack of involvement.**

As unfair as it seems, there are many reasons why siblings do not help with caregiving. Even though you do not agree with their reasoning, try to understand why you brother does not feel his visits are meaningful. He travels several hundred miles to visit, and then mom does not remember who he is and will forget his visit as soon as he leaves. Not only do these visits take time and cost money, but he probably feels a great deal of grief afterwards.

Instead of becoming angry and reprimanding him for his lack of attention to mom, suggest that your bother visits whenever he is available. Let him know that you understand that it is hard for him and it may seem like a waste of time. Thank him for the help and support he is able to contribute but offer him a different perspective. Tell him that he will probably feel better emotionally after mom is gone if he visits occasionally, no matter how painful it is.

If visits are not for him, suggest that he could call weekly or write mom short notes every so often and send pictures of the family. Although communicating by phone and mail can still be challenging and upsetting, they are less involved ways of maintaining this connection and showing your loved ones that they are still loved. As caregivers, at some point we must realize that we cannot change others and must pick our battles.

### **Refresh #3: I haven't taken time to learn about the progression of mom's condition.**

You should be proud of the fact that your mom's move to assisted living has been successful. You as a caregiver have more help and you both have more resources available, and that ensures that your mom is well cared for and that should give you peace of mind. However, caregiving needs can change quickly, especially when dementia is a factor.

It would be wise to give yourself a deadline to begin researching the next steps in her care and make a to-do list of all the future bases that must be covered. The first goal is completing the research itself, which can be done at your convenience online. You could also speak with your loved one's doctor, social workers, nurses and other medical professionals to get more personalized insight into her condition. While each dementia patient experiences a unique progression through the different stages and symptoms, an idea of what to expect is invaluable.

The next step to take is to speak with the administrator at mom's assisted living facility to learn what their care limits are and ask about price increases as her needs grow. Once mom surpasses the level of care that the Assisted Living can provide, she will need to move to a higher-level care facility. For this reason, it will be helpful to investigate memory care units or skilled nursing facilities in your community, so that you are prepared if/when the move is necessary. Ask your local resource center, friends, families, and medical professionals for referrals, and search online.

All of this does not have to be done at once but have these goals on the radar and planning ahead will help for future surprises and help you feel prepared.

### **Refresh #4: I keep putting off my own medical appointments.**

The cardinal rule of caregiving should be: **Take Care of Yourself!** Your mom has professionals looking after her most of the time. Yes, you take her to medical appointments, but you have to make time for your own. As mentioned, care needs can change quickly. Use the time to get caught up on your own care, both physical and mental. It will better prepare you for the changes in your mom's needs. Furthermore, if you neglect your own care needs and get sick, then your loved one will have nobody to take them to their appointments. The better shape that you are in, the better you will be able to care for your loved one.

### **Refreshing Your Own Care Plan**

We have gone through Sarah's hypothetical care plan refresher, but now it is time to examine your own routine and write out your own lists. You might only have one or two areas that could

use improvement, or you might see several areas that could be addressed. This exercise may seem overwhelming, but it is crucial to think about your care plan from time to time to ensure you are meeting the needs (including your own), you are able to handle emerging changes, and to know that your approach is still the most effective one. Just remember to give yourself credit for your caregiving “wins” and allocate ample time when it come to rectifying problems. If you take the time to develop a solid care plan now and revisit it every few months, your challenges list (and stress) should begin to shrink.

This article was adapted from *Aging Care: Spring Cleaning: How to Refresh Your Caregiving Routine*, By: Carol Bradley Bursack, Updated, 2019.

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***\*If you would like to join our mailing list to learn more about programs and services available to you contact our Family Caregiver Support Coordinator at [caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org](mailto:caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org)***

For referrals to community organizations in Guilford County that assist older adults and caregivers, contact Senior Resources of Guilford’s SeniorLine at (336) 884-6981 in High Point, all other areas (336) 333-6981 or the Caregiver Support Coordinator, at (336) 373-4816 in Greensboro or (336) 883-3586 in High Point.



North Carolina Family Caregiver Support Program  
Completing the Care