

Help Wanted: Energetic person to provide constant companionship to someone who is unable to care for self. Position includes all cooking, housecleaning, yard work, and personal care. Must be responsible, creative and alert 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Experience dealing with social security, Medicare, insurance, and other agencies a plus. Heavy lifting required. No vacations. No holidays. No pay. Call.....

Who would want this job? It doesn't sound like many would want it, but millions of people have the job now.

Caregivers not only perform hands on tasks like bathing, cooking or handling financial business – but they also provide emotional support and help with problem solving and decision making in regard to providing care.

Caregiver statistics

- 34.2 million informal caregivers of adults who are 50 years of age and older
- 60% are female
- 60% are employed – working an average of 34.8 hours per week
- Average age of caregiver is 50.3
- 86% care for relatives
- Provide an average of 24.1 hours per week of care

Most have no formal training - and they are busy! They may have their own children, grandchildren, work, and other responsibilities. Because caregivers are so busy, they tend to pay little attention to their own needs. They may not get enough sleep, nutritious meals, physical activity, or social time with friends. They also may not seek healthcare or find time for themselves.

Burdens of Caregiving

- Relationships/roles can change - there may be a role reversal between caregiver and care receiver. Examples include children that may feel they have a role reversal with parents when providing care – or, a husband that has to do household tasks that his wife always took care of
- Negative relationships – caregiver and care receiver may have a history of not getting along
- There may be unresolved issues from the past between the caregiver and care receiver
- Losses occur for caregiver – could be a job and money resulting from the job loss, relationships with friends, health and well-being, control of their lives, freedom to do what they want, and sometimes their very identity
- Difficult behaviors of care receiver
- Disagreement with family members about care
- Communication with health care professionals
- Unmet personal needs

These burdens and challenges contribute to increasing levels of stress and can lead to burnout. Caregivers suffer from higher stress than their cohorts.

What are your typical warning signs of stress?

Signs of caregiver stress: feeling muscle tension, headaches, mental and physical fatigue, chronic ailments, anxiety, irritability, and depression.

Caregivers are encouraged to practice self-care to help prevent and manage stress. Some methods of self-care include:

- Practice relaxation/rejuvenation techniques
- Express their feelings/talk to someone
- Rid themselves of the “I have to do it all” attitude – accept help or ask others for help
- Educate themselves on the caregiver’s condition and the skills needed to assist them
- Set realistic expectations
- Take care of their physical needs
- Participate in wellness programs
- Participate in support groups
- Utilize respite care
- Acknowledge emotions
 - Anger
 - Guilt
 - Fear
- Practice positive self-talk
- Practice good communication techniques



Opportunities of Caregiving

- Caregivers and receivers will have the chance to grow closer by spending more time together, reminiscing, and talking about life.
- Caregivers can feel a sense of purpose in personally giving the care receiver the best possible care. Even those who care out of a sense of duty are pleased that they can look after their family members.
- Caregivers feel a sense of achievement or increased self-worth. Fulfilling responsibilities can make them feel better about themselves.
- The caring relationship has the chance to continue, or the caregiving experience allows participants in a rocky relationship to make amends and grow closer.
- Caregiving can be viewed as an opportunity to repay the care receiver for mutual caring in the past and to enjoy time together.

It is important to note that overall, family members report that caregiving is rewarding. Many of them experience good times with laughter and happiness and they try to focus on feelings of joy, warmth, closeness and love. Caregivers throughout Illinois say there are opportunities and good times, and there are burdens brought on by uncomfortable feelings. But they still say they would do it again.

Caregiving Quotes:

"We often spend more time together, reminisce and talk about the meaning of life...we have grown closer to one another."

"I am satisfied that I can look after the care receiver, even though I do it because I feel it is my duty."

"I feel a sense of purpose in personally giving care – and providing the best care possible."

"Fulfilling this responsibility as a caregiver makes me feel good about myself. Our caring relationship has been able to continue."

"Providing care for my family members has been a way to repay them for the care they gave me in the past."

Caregiver Resources:

- Illinois Department on Aging Caregiver Support:

https://www2.illinois.gov/aging/CommunityServices/caregiver/Pages/caregiver_links.aspx

- US Administration on Aging Eldercare Locator

<https://eldercare.acl.gov>

- U of I Extension Caregiving Resources page

<https://extension.illinois.edu/global/caregiving-resources>

- Family Caregiver Alliance

www.caregiver.org

- AARP Caregiving Tools

<http://www.aarp.org/home-family/caregiving/caregiving-tools/>

- National Institute on Aging Caregiving page:

https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/featured/caregiving?utm_source=201601107_caregivermonth&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=ealert

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