

A Guide for Caregivers

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Caregivers play a significant role in the health and well-being of a loved one. But this role can also be physically and emotionally challenging for the caregiver. As **Director of Geriatrics for CCA Health California**, I am well aware of the many challenges that caregivers face.

I grew up in a multi-generational household, first helping my parents care for my grandparents, then serving as the caregiver for my aunt. In my professional role, I have helped many of our health plan members age well in their own homes. These experiences have given me firsthand insights into the lives of our members and their caregivers.

At CCA Health California, we believe that every individual has the right to live well in their own home for as long as possible. We understand how to address and navigate the many challenges you face as a caregiver and are committed to helping you in this journey.

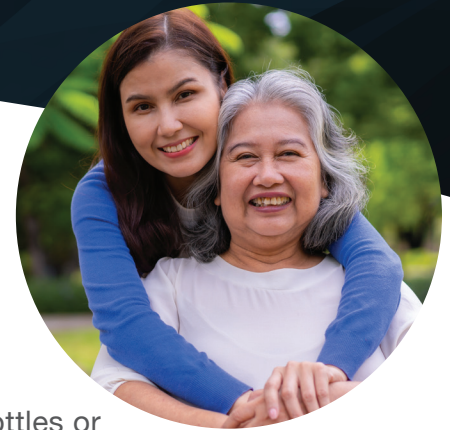
The Role of a Caregiver

Taking care of your loved one means more than just addressing their physical and emotional health. You also must ensure their safety at home and communicate on their behalf. These tips can help you with your caregiving responsibilities.

1. ENSURE HOME SAFETY:

Identifying potential hazards can ensure your loved one's safety. For example:

- Remove items that may cause trips or falls, such as throw rugs, cords, or clutter.
- Make sure kitchens, bathrooms, stairwells, and hallways are well lit.
- Install handrails in showers, near toilets, and in stairways.



- Organize current medications in bottles or pill boxes and arrange them for ease of use.
- Remove tools and appliances that your loved one should no longer be using.
- Use assistive devices indoors and outdoors to prevent falls.

2. KEEP MEDICINE AND SCHEDULES HANDY:

Having information and medicines organized and accessible can help ease day-to-day care and ensures others can jump in to help:

- **Medical history form:** Keep a record of conditions, hospitalizations, known allergies, and prescriptions to make appointments easier.
- **Appointment calendar:** Keep a calendar of all your appointments for you and your loved one so you know your schedule at a glance.
- **Caregiving schedule:** If you're sharing caregiving duties with others, posting the schedule can help ensure consistent care for your loved one while reducing your stress.

3. LEVERAGE COMMUNITY RESOURCES:

There are local organizations that provide resources to improve the well-being of your loved one and assist with common needs:

The California Department of Aging can connect you to services for senior care, nutrition, exercise, transportation, and more. Their website (www.aging.ca.gov) offers information and support for caregivers, or you can call them at 800-510-2020.

SASCC offers activities for seniors along with resources that can help them continue to live well in their community, including a senior center with a full calendar of social activities, an adult day program, and its RYDE senior transportation program for adults aged 65 and older. To learn more, visit www.sascc.org.

The Department of Aging and Adult Services aims to ensure a safe and independent lifestyle for older adults, dependent adults, and people with disabilities. It offers a senior nutrition program, adult protective services, and in-home support. To learn more, call 408-755-7600.

Institute on Aging offers a wealth of services to both seniors and their caregivers. One unique feature is its Friendship Line, a 24-hour resource for crisis intervention and a “warm line” for emotional support, medication reminders, and well-being checks. You can call the Friendship Line at 888-670-1360.

Senior centers provide an opportunity for your loved one to socialize with others and take part in fun activities. The following website provides contact information for California Senior Centers: www.careforcalifornia.net.

Second Harvest Food Bank (800-984-3663) and **Meals on Wheels** (408-350-3200) are just two of several local organizations that can provide well-balanced, nutritious meals.

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Taking Care of You

Caregiver burnout is all too common. Caregivers need to juggle multiple roles and responsibilities that can leave a person feeling exhausted, disorganized, guilty, and isolated. Many times, a caregiver prioritizes the needs of their loved ones over their



own, but this pattern can impact both your own and your loved one’s quality of life. Here are some tips we’ve learned while working with CCA Health members and their families:

1. ASK FOR HELP. While you want to do everything you can for your loved one, caregivers often don’t accept help because they don’t want to place the burden on others. Depending on your comfort level and if others are available to help, you can begin by asking them to make a social visit with your loved one or help with transportation to appointments or other activities. They can also pick up medicine or food.

2. KNOW THE SIGNS OF DEPRESSION. We all have “blue” days and may be unhappy from time to time, but the demands of caregiving can lead to longer bouts of sadness. It’s important for caregivers to recognize the signs of depression, such as: feeling sad, hopeless, or helpless; loss of energy; trouble sleeping; anger or irritability; self-loathing or thoughts of suicide. If you’re experiencing signs of depression that last for more than two weeks or if your symptoms worsen, talk to your doctor right away.

3. MANAGE STRESS. Chronic stress can have negative impacts on your health and well-being. It’s important to recognize the signs, such as feeling overwhelmed or constantly worried, having frequent headaches or physical pain, gaining or losing weight, becoming easily irritated or angered, and more. To manage your stress, be sure to take care of yourself, with a focus on exercise, sleep, and eating well.

4. RESPECT YOUR BOUNDARIES. To avoid burnout, you need periods of rest. Asking people to help give you time off, whether it’s a day or a week every few months, will enable you to provide long-term care for your loved one. The more shifts you can share the better, whether that’s with family or professional caregivers.



CCA Health California is a health plan that works closely with its Medicare members, as well as providers and community organizations, to help individuals live well in their own homes and communities. Visit ccahealthca.org.