

CARING FOR AGING PARENTS

Tips, Tools, and Resources For Caregivers



WELCOME

Dear Caregiver,

Commonwealth Care Alliance® knows that caring for an aging parent is hard work. We recognize the important role you play in taking care of a loved one and understand the demands on your time and emotional health. While caregiving is a rewarding experience, we also know that it often comes with day-to-day stresses and challenges.

You're not alone in your caregiving efforts. To make your responsibilities a little easier, we offer this book as a guide for supporting your aging parents. With this book you can track and organize your loved one's medical information in one place and find support services.

We hope these tools help you provide the best care possible for your loved one. Visit www.commonwealthcarealliance.org to learn more about resources for caregivers. Thank you for the important work you do every day.

Sincerely,

Commonwealth Care Alliance



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**Organizing your loved one's
information in one place will
help you manage their care
and make sticking to a regular
schedule of visits easier.**

SECTION ONE

Tools to Organize and
Manage Your Loved One's Care



MEDICAL HISTORY

You can help your loved one get ready for an appointment with a new healthcare provider by keeping track of his or her medical history. Having this information is also helpful in an emergency. Use the checklist below to track your loved one’s personal and family history of medical conditions.

	Personal History	Family History
Alcohol/drug abuse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alzheimer’s disease/dementia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arthritis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Asthma	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blood disorders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cancer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Depression	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Diabetes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Digestive problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hearing loss	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Heart disease	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hepatitis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
High blood pressure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
High cholesterol	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kidney disease	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lung disease	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mental illness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Osteoporosis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Skin problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stroke	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thyroid problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vision problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

MEDICINE RECORD AND ALLERGY LIST

Medicine Record: Keeping a record of your loved one's medications and allergies will help prevent overmedication and drug interactions.

Write down the medications your loved one is taking, including prescription drugs, over-the-counter drugs, and supplements (including vitamins, minerals, and herbals). Your loved one should bring this list to all medical appointments.

Medicine Name	What It Looks Like	How Much to Take	How and When to Use	Why It Was Prescribed	Who Prescribed it

Allergy List: A drug allergy happens when there is an abnormal reaction to a medication or dietary supplement. Write down the medications your loved one has had a problem with and their reaction, such as a rash, hives, fever, etc.

Medicine Name	Reaction to Medicine

TREATMENT LOG

Keeping a record of your loved one’s treatments, procedures, and hospital stays between doctor visits is helpful for managing their care. Use this form to track your loved one’s treatment history to share at future appointments.

Date	Treatment/Procedure	Doctor	Notes/Instructions

APPOINTMENT CALENDAR

Seniors with chronic illnesses often see many different doctors and other healthcare providers, so keeping track of their schedule can be a challenge. Use this calendar template to schedule and plan for upcoming appointments.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

CAREGIVING SCHEDULE

Think about creating a shared schedule if others assist you in caring for your loved one. Make a detailed list of everything you do when caring for your loved one, such as driving them to appointments or picking up medications, and write down who is responsible for that task.

Task	Person	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thur.	Fri.	Sat.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

In the event of an emergency, it's important to know who to contact about your loved one's care. Use the form below to keep track of important phone numbers for your loved one's doctors, pharmacy, and more.

	Name/Relationship	Phone Number
Emergency Contact (Primary)		
Emergency Contact (Secondary)		
Commonwealth Care Alliance RN/NP/PA		
Primary Care Provider		
Doctor (Specialist)		
Doctor (Specialist)		
Preferred Hospital		
Pharmacy		
Neighbor		
Police Department		
Fire Department		
Poison Control		
Other		

Managing your parent's health, safety at home, emotional health, and communication are common concerns for caregivers. Use these everyday tips so you can provide the best care possible.

SECTION TWO

Everyday Advice



COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR LOVED ONE'S PROVIDER

Establishing good communication with your loved one's healthcare providers is an important part of understanding their condition, plan of care, and treatment. Use these tips as a guide to make the most of your senior's medical appointments.

Attend Medical Appointments – Consider attending medical appointments with your loved one to learn more about their health and manage medical information. You can offer support and make sure your senior gets the medical care they need.

Pick One Family Member as a Point of Contact – It's often easier to select one family member as the primary point of contact with your loved one's healthcare providers. This person can speak directly to the doctors and share information with the rest of the family.

Make Sure Information Is Shared with Other Providers – Get to know your loved one's care team and ask that information be shared between the primary care providers, specialists, and other healthcare professionals.

Keep a Detailed Medical Record – Keep track of your loved one's past and current medical conditions, prescription and over-the-counter medications, and treatment history so they can be shared at medical appointments. It's important to record any important details, such as changes in behavior, routines, or eating habits. Use the worksheets at the beginning of this book to track this information.

Prepare a List of Questions – Don't be afraid to ask the healthcare provider more about your loved one's condition and treatment plan. Do you have questions about their medications, mental health, or necessary tests? Make a list of questions and bring them to the appointment.

Take Notes at Appointments – You may receive a lot of information about your loved one's condition and treatment plan. It's helpful to write down any instructions and explanations that your loved one's provider discusses so the information will not be forgotten.

ADULT PREVENTIVE CARE GUIDELINES

It's important for your aging parent to get regular screenings and tests to stay in good health. While every person is different, the following Commonwealth Care Alliance routine preventive care guidelines can help determine when your loved one should receive preventive screenings. Talk to your parent's Commonwealth Care Alliance care manager or primary care doctor about what is right for them.

WHAT	✓	WHY	WHEN	IS THIS FOR ME?
ROUTINE TESTS		To prevent diseases or detect them early enough to prevent complications and keep you in good health.	Based on USPSTF and CDC Guidelines*	What tests or treatments are right for you depend on your age, overall health, and what you value most in life.
PHYSICAL EXAM		During a physical examination, your doctor can review your health status and find health problems before they hurt you.	Every 1-3 years 18 - 49 Yearly 50+	Everyone should have an exam every few years. Go more often if you are over 65, have chronic diseases, or other risk factors, such as those noted below.
WEIGHT/BODY MASS		Getting your weight down to what's best for your height will help you feel healthier and help prevent diabetes and heart disease.	Yearly 18+	Unwanted weight gain and weight loss are signs of a potential problem. If you are a wheelchair user and cannot be weighed on the scale in your doctor's office, ask your doctor for help.
BLOOD PRESSURE		Lower blood pressure helps reduce your risk of stroke, kidney failure, heart disease, and blindness. Recent research shows that getting blood pressure even lower than the targets noted here has added benefit for most people.	Every visit 18+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are under 65 or if you have diabetes, your blood pressure should be under 140/90. • If you are over 65 and do not have diabetes, your blood pressure should be under 150/90.

ADULT PREVENTIVE CARE GUIDELINES, Continued

WHAT	✓	WHY	WHEN	IS THIS FOR ME?
EYE EXAM		Regular eye exams can help find cataracts (aging-related cloudiness of the lens), diabetes, glaucoma (elevated pressure in the eye), and other diseases early enough to save your vision.	Every 1-3 years 40+	If you have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, or glaucoma, talk to your care manager or primary care doctor about seeing an eye care specialist.
CHOLESTEROL TEST		High cholesterol can clog your arteries. This can cause strokes, heart attacks, and leg pain. Healthy eating, exercise, and medications can help.	Every 5 years 18+	If you have diabetes, high blood pressure, or other risks for heart disease and stroke, your care manager or primary care doctor may recommend testing more often.
DIABETES TEST		Regular testing can help find diabetes early. Early treatment with diet, exercise, or medications can help prevent complications such as kidney failure, blindness, leg pain, heart disease, and more.	Every 3 years 45+	Testing should start earlier, and it should be done more often if you are overweight or have a family history of diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or heart disease.
HIV/HEPATITIS TEST		Health experts recommend testing for HIV and hepatitis infections at least once in each person's life and more often if you have repeated potential exposures to these viruses.	At least once 18+	You should be tested more often if you have unprotected sex or share needles to inject drugs.

ADULT PREVENTIVE CARE GUIDELINES, Continued

WHAT	✓	WHY	WHEN	IS THIS FOR ME?
PAP/HPV TEST FOR CERVICAL CANCER		Pap smears help find cervical changes before they become cancer. Human papillomavirus (HPV), a sexually transmitted infection, can increase the risk of developing cervical cancer. HPV testing for useful in early detection.	Every 3 years 21 - 29 Every 5 years 30-65	Sexually active women should start Pap smears at age 21 and repeat every 3 years. Starting at age 30, move to every 5 years (with HPV virus testing included).
MAMMOGRAM FOR BREAST CANCER		Periodic mammograms may help find breast cancer early, allowing for earlier treatment, which may prolong life.	Every 2 years 50 - 74	All women should have a mammogram periodically. Ask your care manager or primary care doctor if you should start at an earlier age or continue past age 74 if you have risks, such as family history.
COLONOSCOPY FOR COLON CANCER TESTING		A colonoscopy can help find tumors before they become cancer. These and early cancers can be completely removed and cured this way.	Every 10 years 50 - 75	Have a colonoscopy every 10 years. However, a colonoscopy may be a risky procedure for some frail elderly people. Talk to your care manager or primary care doctor about alternative tests.
AORTIC ANEURYSM TESTING		A painless ultrasound picture of your stomach can find a dangerous swelling of your largest artery and save your life.	Once 65 - 75	Based on the available research, it is recommended that this screening be done once in men who have ever smoked.
BONE THICKNESS TEST		Simple bone thickness tests can detect bone thinning (osteoporosis), which can be treated with medications to prevent bone loss. This can reduce your risk of painful, disabling bone breaks.	Once 65+	All women should be tested at least once. Start earlier if you are at higher risk of osteoporosis. Important risks include family history, Caucasian/Asian race, low weight, and smoking.

ADULT PREVENTIVE CARE GUIDELINES, Continued

WHAT	✓	WHY	WHEN	IS THIS FOR ME?
VACCINATIONS		You can prevent disease with vaccines against tetanus (every 10 years), flu (every fall), pneumonia (once), and shingles (once) . Check with your care manager or primary care doctor about these vaccines.		
ROUTINE COUNSELING		These are several important topics to discuss with your care team that can help you continue your healthy habits and make positive changes in your life. Some important topics may include tobacco use, alcohol and drug use, and domestic abuse .		
ADVANCE CARE PLANNING		Make sure you receive the care you want - even if you are unable to communicate your wishes. Your care manager or primary care doctor can help.	Review yearly	Everyone should work with their care manager or primary care doctor to complete and sign a MOLST (Medical Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment) and Health Care Proxy form.

✓ You can use this space to mark which topics you want to talk to you care manager or doctor about and can bring this chart with you to your appointments.

* United States Preventive Services Task Force and the Centers for Disease Control

HOME SAFETY CHECKLIST

A safe home will help keep you and the person you're caring for healthy. Use this checklist to make your loved one's home safer by placing a check mark in the "yes" or "no" column for each question. You can improve home safety and help prevent accidents by addressing the questions you answered "no."

Yes	No	
		Are there sturdy handrails or banisters by all steps and stairs?
		Is there enough lighting in all stairs and hallways?
		Is there a light switch at both the top and bottom of stairs?
		Is the house clear of clutter and simplified as much as possible?
		Are stairways and hallways clear of clutter and loose objects?
		Is there a light switch by the doorway of each room?
		Is there a flashlight, light switch, or lamp beside each bed?
		Are all electric cords placed close to walls, out of pathways?
		Are rugs secured around all edges?
		Are rugs smooth and flat with no folds or wrinkles?
		Is there a list of emergency phone numbers by the telephone? Fire, police, emergency, ambulance?
		Are all medicines marked clearly? Name of medicine, date purchased, how taken, when taken?
		Is there a non-skid surface on the floor of the bathtub or shower? Non-skid strips or rubber mat?
		Are there adequate hand holds for getting in and out of shower or bathtub?
		Are furnishings and often-used items always kept in the same place?
		Is constant noise and confusion avoided? Are the television and radio shut off when not in use?
		Does your loved one have Alzheimer's disease or a related disorder? If yes, please continue.
		Is the top of each stairway protected with a safety gate to prevent falls?
		Is there enough space for the person to pace and move freely?

Yes	No	<i>Continued</i>
		Have all tools and appliances the person can no longer use safely been removed or locked up?
		Have all firearms been locked up?
		Are the car keys kept in a place where the person can't find them?
		Are all doors secured in such a way that the person can't get out without assistance?
		Are all windows secured in such a way that the person can't get out without assistance?
		Have all radiators been blocked off or covered with radiator guards?
		Are all exposed hot water pipes covered?
		Is the use of cigarettes and matches either prohibited or carefully supervised?
		Have interior doors been altered to prevent the person from accidentally locking him/herself in a room?
		Is the stove inoperable when not in use?
		Have detergents or similar materials been removed or locked up?

Suggestions:

- Remove items that may cause trips or falls, such as throw rugs.
- Use a combination of sounds, lights, colors, and surface textures for seniors who have lost one or more senses.
- Make sure work areas, such as the kitchen, are well lighted.

(Adapted from Mass.gov - Caregiving Resources)

TIPS FOR EATING HEALTHY ON A BUDGET

If you or your loved one is living on a fixed budget, there are many things you can do to spend less and eat better. Use these tips to help you save money while eating foods that will make you feel good!

Use What You Have – Go through your food pantry and kitchen at home so you don't buy two of the same item. Check expiration dates before you throw something out.

Save Food Before It Goes Bad – If your bread or fruits and vegetables are going bad, don't throw them out. Freeze them before they go bad, or make the bread into breadcrumbs!

Make a Food Budget – Budget for how much you want to spend per week on food and stick to it. Buy foods on sale, items in bulk, and store brands to save money.

Buy for the Whole Week in One Stop – Studies show that if you go to the grocery store more than one time a week, you spend more money. Try and get everything you need for the week in one trip.

Make a Grocery List – Make a list based on the meals you want and the food you already have. Check for coupons and add those foods to the list for the week. Stick to your list when you're in the grocery store.

Find Healthier Food on the Outside Walls of the Grocery Store – Most grocery stores are set up to have the healthier food on the outside walls of the store. The inner aisles tend to have the unhealthy food. Avoid going down aisles so that you are not tempted to buy chips, cookies, or other unhealthy food.

Use a Cab if Needed – If you take a cab, you can carry much more with you and avoid having to stop at the grocery store more than once per week. You may spend ten dollars on a cab, but you will save money in the long run.

Buy Frozen Fruits and Vegetables – Frozen fruits and vegetables are often as healthy as fresh varieties and are generally cheaper. Also look for fresh fruits and vegetables that are in season — they tend to be cheaper. Many farmers markets in Massachusetts accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

Never Go to the Grocery Store Hungry – Everything looks good when you're hungry. Have a snack or meal before going to the grocery store. That way, you won't buy something you don't need on impulse. If you're bringing your kids to the store, make sure to feed them, too.

HOW TO AVOID ISOLATION

It's not uncommon for seniors — and their caregivers — to experience some level of loneliness and social isolation. Getting the person you care for involved with activities and social interaction will go a long way in helping them avoid isolation and improve their health.

Here are some tips for helping seniors avoid isolation:

- **Get involved with hobbies and interests.** Whether your loved one enjoys going to the park, bowling, or knitting, make these activities a part of their everyday lives.
- **Attend a local senior center.** This is a great way to meet and socialize with others, and also get involved in new activities and outings.
- **Stay active with places of worship.** If your loved one was a regular churchgoer, make this a part of their weekly routine.
- **Take a class.** The person you care for may enjoy taking an exercise class, learning how to use a computer, or another class that interests them.
- **Dine with others.** Meal time may be more enjoyable for your loved one if they're able to share it with a family member, friend, or acquaintance, whether they're dining at home or at a restaurant.

CAREGIVER SUPPORT FROM COMMONWEALTH CARE ALLIANCE

Commonwealth Care Alliance offers support and resources to help you with the day-to-day challenges you face as a caregiver.

Caregiver Resources Website

Visit the Caregiver Resources section of our website to learn more about educational, social, and online resources to help you provide the best care possible for your loved one. Watch our videos and take our quizzes to learn more about caring for loved ones, or sign up for upcoming events.

<http://commonwealthcaresco.org/resources/caring-for-our-caregivers>

CAREGIVER RESOURCES

You can learn more about caring for your aging parent or loved one on the following websites. These organizations offer valuable resources, tools, and information for caregivers and their families.

Medicare.gov - www.medicare.gov

The official U.S. Government site for Medicare offers resources about caring for an aging or seriously ill family member.

Eldercare Locator - www.eldercare.gov/Eldercare.NET/Public/Index.aspx

The Eldercare Locator is a public service of the U.S. Administration on Aging and connects you and your family to community services for older adults.

Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs - www.mass.gov/elders

Elder Affairs connects older adults with resources to live well in every community throughout Massachusetts.

National Institute on Aging - www.nia.nih.gov

Find a wide variety of research-based information and resources related to health and aging.

Family Caregiver Alliance - www.caregiver.org

The alliance supports caregivers through education, services, research, and advocacy.

Caregiver Action Network - <http://caregiveraction.org/>

The Caregiver Action Network is non-profit organization providing education, peer support, and resources to family caregivers.

Administration on Aging - www.aoa.gov

The Administration on Aging works to make sure that older Americans can stay independent in their communities.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) - www.mass.gov/snap

The federal government provides food assistance benefits for low-income seniors through SNAP.



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