



Faith Health Initiative

Care for the Caregiver

Taking care of the sick is our spiritual calling. Sometimes the sick person is an immediate family member, other times he or she is a beloved member of our faith-community or someone we encounter by chance. In all situations, our responsibility for caretaking is clear.

Luke 10:30-38 (NIV) In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

In this famous example, the Samaritan saw a need and was willing to expend his physical, emotional, and financial resources to ensure the injured man was restored to health. Jesus commended his "mercy." One can imagine that *this* story ended well. The injured man was healed with the loving interventions of the Samaritan. But what if the injured man required long term care? What if the Samaritan would have been required to move the man into his home, expend his resources for months or even years? Does God call us into that type of care? Many people find themselves in just such a situation. Navigating this labor intensive lifestyle that is focused on meeting the needs of another can be rewarding, yet unimaginably exhausting. Follow these easy tips to lessen the burden.

Collect the Facts. The single most important thing you can do to function effectively as a caregiver is to create and maintain a comprehensive file of information about the person you are caring for. Make sure to include medical history, allergies, medications, insurance information, and legal documents like power of attorney and living will. Keep the file somewhere that you can access easily for doctor's appointments and emergencies.

Update information regularly. In maintaining organized records, you will reduce stress and anxiety as you navigate the healthcare system.

Get support! Ask for help from others when needed. Find a support group of those who share similar circumstances. Support groups can be disease-specific (Alzheimer's), relationship-based (children caring for parents) and be offered in person, online, or via the telephone.



For more information on groups, contact your local hospital's social services department, adult care centers, area agencies on aging, or your own faith-community. Many times, caregivers can feel isolated and these feelings can lead to depression, anxiety, and outbursts. Simply sharing your struggles with others can add needed perspective.

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Keep your own life going! Put the time into taking care of yourself, too. Make sure you get adequate sleep, eat nutritionally, and get some exercise. Take a few minutes to get away, take a walk, read your Bible, meditate and pray, or do your favorite hobby. Don't sacrifice your own relationships with your spouse and children. Ensure that you carve out time each day to do something that revives you. Caregivers are susceptible to stress and burnout so don't be afraid to ask for help and, if necessary, demand that others bear some of the burden. In advocating for yourself, you will be more likely to provide care in the long term.

Give up the guilt! Surprisingly, those who provide care to their loved ones never seem to feel they have done enough. They often regret harsh words or time spent away. Sadly, many caregivers don't want to ask for help, feeling as though *they should* be able to meet all their family member's needs without assistance. When they are forced to reach out, they are crippled by guilt and shame. To avoid these toxic caregiver emotions, establish expectations that are realistic. Understand that some guilt is normal because your intentions are good but your time, resources, and skills are limited. Accept that you're just going to feel guilty sometimes -- so try to get comfortable with that gap between perfection and reality instead of beating yourself up over it.

CAREGIVER RESOURCES

ElderSource of Greater Indianapolis
317-259-6822, www.ifqi.org

Families First Indiana
317-634-6341, www.familiesfirstindiana.org

Hancock County Senior Services
317-462-3758, www.hcssi.org

Hendricks County Senior Services
317-745-4303, www.hendricksseniors.org

Indiana Hospice & Palliative Care Organization, Inc.
317-464-5145, 800-254-1910 (Helpline), www.ihpco.org

Shelby Senior Services, Inc.
317-398-0127, www.shelbyseniorservices.org

Indiana 2-1-1 (Connect to Help)

CICOA's Aging & Disability Resource Center at 317-254-3660 www.cicoa.org

Eldercare Locator 1-800-677-1116 or www.eldercare.gov

Isaiah 40:29-31(NIV)

"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."