



How do I take care of myself while managing someone else's care?

THE **COPD** CAREGIVER'S TOOLKIT



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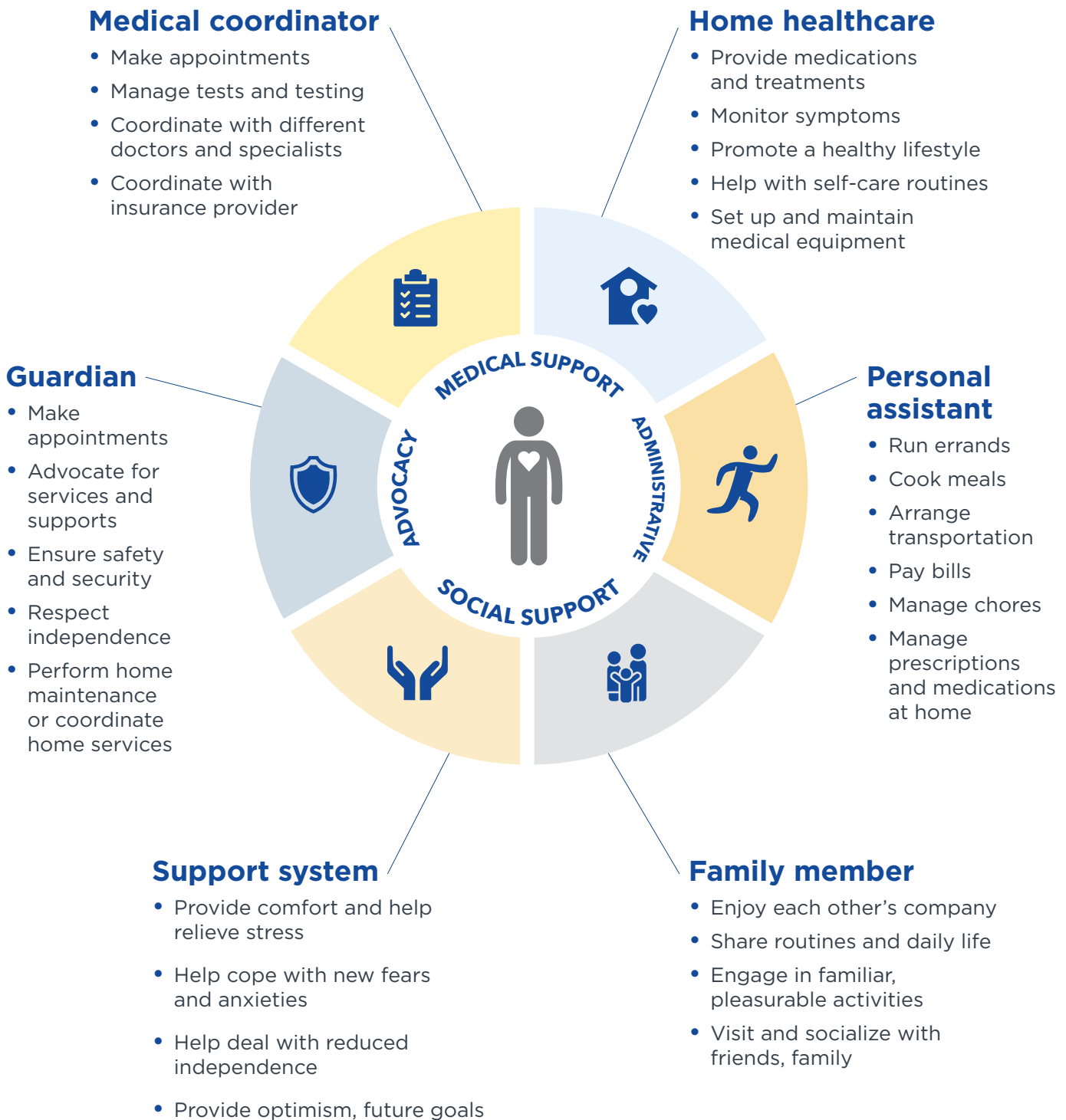
How do I take care of myself while managing someone else's care?

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THE MANY ROLES OF A CAREGIVER

Caregivers have shared with us that caregiving is more than a single role. It can involve many types of roles, each with a different set of responsibilities and skills. If you have been a caregiver for a while, you may recognize yourself in these “job titles.” If you are new to caregiving, you may find it useful to see the diversity of caregiving tasks so you can begin to get the support you need.



MAINTAINING YOUR HEALTH

It's important to take care of others, but it's important to also take care of yourself. Taking care of your mind and body will make you happier and a better caregiver, too.

Recognizing stress

Look for these signs of stress so you can do something about them:

- feeling tired all the time;
- getting sick more than usual;
- not sleeping enough;
- being irritated, impatient, or forgetful;
- not enjoying activities you used to enjoy;
- becoming more distant from people.

Reducing stress

Do these things to help reduce your stress levels:

- **Sleep:** Getting enough sleep is the best way to reduce stress. Try to get 7-8 hours a night.
- **Exercise:** Try to exercise 3 times a week. If it's hard to find a place to exercise, try walking more. Any moving is better than no moving.
- **Meditate:** Find a quiet space where you can sit, close your eyes, and relax. Take deep breaths and slowly exhale. Focus on your breath. Even two minutes of meditation a day can help you relax and find peace for a few minutes.
- **“Me Time”:** It's easy to get caught up in your job as a caregiver. Don't forget to find time to do some things you enjoy, too. There is always time to fit in some time for yourself. You just have to make it a priority.
- Identify a back-up caregiver to help support you in the caregiving process. You can also look into respite care service providers in your area. See tips for respite care on the next few pages.

Signs of anxiety

Do you or the person you care for have some of these symptoms:

- hot and cold flashes;
- fast heartbeat;
- chest tightness;
- snowballing worries;
- obsessive thinking and compulsive behavior?

If so, please ask your doctor or other healthcare providers about anxiety and treatment options.



I went from being an equal to having to take care of her. My week is planned around when I have to be at her house. I am lucky because the one business that requires me to be out of the house and even out of town, is not really active this time of year. If this had happened in the fall, I do not know how I could have assisted her.

— COPD Caregiver

MAINTAINING YOUR HEALTH (continued)

Signs of depression

Do you or the person you care for have some of these symptoms:

- loss of interest in activities;
- withdrawn from family and friends;
- unproductivity at work;
- change in weight and/or appetite;
- trouble falling asleep or staying asleep;
- feelings of worthlessness;
- increased levels of sadness;
- negative thinking about themselves, e.g. "I'm a failure?"

If so, please ask your doctor or other healthcare providers about depression and treatment options.

Staying active

Find opportunities to take part in your own health programs.



For more on how caregivers care for themselves, see [AARP's Home and Family Caregiving page](#) and [NIA's page on caregiving](#).



Tips for taking care of your own physical well-being

- Check with your insurance provider for any fitness programs that it may support.
- Seek out other fitness programs or relaxation programs such as yoga or meditation classes.
- Look for an opportunity to exercise or relax while your loved one is at his/her own rehabilitation program.
- Ensure you practice your own nutrition program.
- Ensure you are eating right.
- Seek out nutrition services for yourself, too.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Caregiver support groups are made up of people who, like you, are dealing with the demands and challenges of caring for another. Support groups are helpful because they can provide both a sense of community as well as tips for managing the everyday issues that caregiving presents.



Why support groups are important

Support groups are an important resource to consider because they offer:

- a caring atmosphere with trust between group members;
- a clear structure and purpose;
- agreed upon group rules, including confidentiality.



What makes a support group good

What makes a support group successful? Good support groups share some common practices and benefits, such as:

- help in dealing with family members;
- information and tools to help you;
- advice about what to expect;
- a safe place to share true feelings;
- a way to make new friends.



Where to find a support group

Support groups for people caring for ill family members are fairly common. Here are some places to look:

- referrals from your healthcare provider;
- social work department at hospitals;
- adult day care centers;
- volunteer organizations;
- faith communities.

BUILDING A COPD CARE MANAGEMENT TEAM

Because you might need to take a break, to travel or just need to have a day to yourself, it's a good idea to set up a care management team so that caregiving may continue in your absence.

Ways to ensure that you have respite care

- Find a secondary caregiver to be a backup so you can take a break, too.
- Look for local programs for senior support in your area.
- If you are able, look into options for support with other household duties, such as meal support or meal delivery services, cleaning services, laundry services, and lawn services.
- Prepare in advance if you need to travel. Find a backup caregiver to support your loved one while you are away. Meet in advance to review your loved one's care plan. This should include emergency numbers, medication lists, power of attorney details, and any other medical documents.



Sometimes dealing with his anxiety and exhaustion around tasks is extremely mentally exhausting for me. Much more so than if I were to simply do the task myself. He may be worried about burdening me, but it takes more time and more mental energy when I have to worry about him and the task at the same time, especially if he is very anxious about a routine task that he really does not have to do.

— COPD Caregiver

MANAGING A CHANGING RELATIONSHIP

The relationship you have with the person you care for will likely change as you begin to help with more daily activities.

Navigating a change in roles

Spouses and adult children are the most common family caregivers. However, for many people it feels unnatural to depend on a spouse or adult child for things he or she used to be able to do independently. As a result, caregivers often encounter feelings of frustration, embarrassment, and awkwardness emerging in a relationship that used to work by very different rules. Navigating the change in relationship can be difficult.

Experts suggest caregivers consider 3 common issues:

- **Listening and communication:** The person you care for may not want to ask for what he or she needs out of fear of being a burden or out of consideration for your time. One suggestion is to set aside a block of time during each visit or day when you can give the person you care for your full attention.
- **Identifying needs:** The person you care for may be reluctant to share what he or she needs, or may ask for many things but appear frustrated or ungrateful. One solution experts offer is to respectfully ask the person you care for about what he or she needs, or would like, rather than assuming you know.
- **Privacy:** People receiving care from family members can feel embarrassed at needing help dressing or bathing. Experts suggest switching to a professional manner when helping with such tasks, and focusing on being matter-of-fact and detached can feel less intrusive.



Tips for having practical conversations with the person you care for

- Denial isn't necessarily a bad thing. In fact, denial is a common strategy for dealing with caregiving needs because both people are in pain. For example, a person with COPD might deny he needs help, but the caregiver wants to help make his daily life better. It's important to accept that everyone has his or her own way of dealing with COPD, and that some people take longer to accept it than others.
- Be clear about your own feelings and objectives. Understand what you are feeling and what you really want to achieve. Communicate your feelings to the person you care for, so he or she understands what you need too.
- Show you understand. It's important to let the person you care for know you hear his or her fears about COPD. Also, communicate that there are still things that he or she can do to help control the situation. Having choices can help people feel more independent.

For more on navigating a spousal relationship, see [AARP's article on spousal caregiving](#).



For more on navigating a parent-child caregiving relationship, see [AARP's article "How Family Caregivers Can Ask for Help."](#)