



# PREPARING TO BECOME A CAREGIVER

Caregivers provide care to people who need some type of ongoing assistance with daily or regularly performed tasks. Examples are preparing meals, monitoring/administering medications, or assisting with activities of daily living – such as bathing or eating. Generally, there are two types of caregivers: formal and informal. Formal caregivers typically provide care to people in institutionalized settings, such as residential or assisted living facilities, and are paid. Informal caregivers are typically unpaid family members or friends who provide the same services in a home environment. Caregivers are essential in caring for people who are aging, have a disability, or have an injury. This article will focus on how to prepare to become an informal caregiver.

## Tips and Considerations

1. Set expectations early. Communicate with your loved one and other family members or loved ones about what they expect and what tasks you will be performing. This can be helpful, especially if you're a first-time caregiver. Some questions to consider before caregiving:
  - Will you be the sole caregiver, or will you have help?
  - Will you live in their home, or will they move into your home?
  - Will you provide care all day, or will you work in shifts?

2. Gather necessary documents and other information from your loved one.
  - List of medications
  - Phone numbers for emergency contacts, healthcare and other providers
  - Dietary requirements
  - Allergies
  - Power of attorney documents for finances and healthcare
  - Living will or advance directive
  - Will
  - Advance healthcare plan
  - Other necessary information
3. Do you know about their disability? Does the person you are caring for have a disability? Educating yourself on your loved one's disability can be helpful in learning the type of care they may need and help you make more informed health decisions. Being knowledgeable about their disability type will help you advocate for your loved one. You will know what accessibility features to look for when traveling outside of your normal routine.
4. Is your house ready? If you are providing care to an older loved one or someone with a mobility disability at home, there are considerations that need to be taken.
  - Does the person use a mobility device? Are there stairs to get inside the home or will the person be using an upstairs bedroom? If there are no bedrooms on the main floor of your home, consider where your loved one will be sleeping. If adding an additional bedroom is not feasible, consider converting another space to a bedroom.
  - Is there a bathroom on the main floor of the home? Is it clutter free and free of tripping hazards to prevent falls? Are the doors wide enough for a wheelchair, walker, etc. to fit? The Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA, suggests doors be a minimum of 32 inches wide for a wheelchair to fit through.
  - Having an accessible kitchen promotes independence. Updating kitchen tools to fit your loved ones needs, having items at an accessible height, and making other modifications will help your loved one move easier through the home.
5. Consider the financial aspects of caregiving.
  - If abruptly thrown into the caregiver role, time off work may be necessary to adjust to your new routine.
  - Expenses not covered by home insurance, such as accessibility renovations
  - Expenses not fully covered by health insurance, such as home health aides
6. Are you able to care for someone else? Caregiving requires you to be physically and emotionally strong. Are you able to physically care for another person? Are you able to handle the emotional stress that may come with caregiving? Are you able to take time off from work if needed?
7. Seek out resources and support groups. Caregiving is a rewarding and challenging job. Sometimes burnout will happen. Joining a caregiving support group may help provide a sense of community and outlet when things get difficult. Building a support system is important as it strengthens your network of people who can help in case of an emergency and provides relief when needed

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