

“I am about to become a caregiver. What can I expect?”

Being as prepared as possible—by asking for help and planning ahead—can help you.

Being a caregiver can be rewarding, but also challenging. Household chores, medical appointments and unexpected emergencies can make it stressful, whether you're caring for an elderly parent, a sick spouse, a disabled child or someone else important to you.

Becoming a caregiver

Caregiving may not be something you expected to do. Sometimes, people are thrust into the role because of a crisis or they are simply the only one available to help. Other times, it happens more gradually.

As a caregiver, your schedule may begin to revolve around the person for whom you're providing care. Caregivers often become responsible for:

- House cleaning
- Bathing and dressing
- Cooking and feeding
- Driving to doctors' appointments
- Keeping track of medical issues
- Managing medication
- Organizing finances

Additionally, the person you're caring for may not seem appreciative of your efforts or may even resist your help. Your loved one may seem agitated, frustrated or embarrassed about needing help with tasks that were once easy to do independently. It can be helpful to imagine the situation from their perspective. Would you be frustrated if you needed help getting dressed, cooking or cleaning?

The person receiving care may also have a cognitive or behavioral health issue that makes it difficult or impossible to think clearly or control their emotions. Sometimes, realizing this can help you be patient when they become irritated or difficult to deal with.

Now that you're a caregiver

There are resources to help you with your role as caregiver:

- **Join a support group** to have an opportunity to talk with other caregivers. Free, monthly support groups are held at Fallon Health's Summit ElderCare locations in Massachusetts (fallonhealth.org/summit).
- **Speak with the doctors.** Ask for a preview of what your loved one is likely to experience.
- **Look online and in your community** for caregiver resources. Visit Fallon's website for caregiver support and our blog, the Caregiver Connection (fallonhealth.org/caregiver-blog).

- **Ask for help.** If financially possible, hire help for chores like house cleaning, lawn care or snow removal. There are apps and websites that can coordinate these services. Always do your research, and make sure those you hire are reputable. Getting assistance from professionals can help make your life easier. You can also ask other family members, friends or neighbors to assist.
- **Plan!** Writing down chores and appointments will help you stay organized and help to reduce stress. Also, plan for the unexpected—emergencies happen!
- **Make time for yourself.** You're going to need to take breaks, so schedule leisure and social activities for yourself. Arrange respite care if your loved one needs constant supervision. (Respite is planned or emergency care provided to a child or adult with special needs in order to provide temporary relief to family caregivers.) Visit the National Respite Network and Resource Center website, listed below.

Working with professional care providers

If your loved one is admitted to a rehabilitation or long-term care facility, communication with professionals at that facility is important.

- **Give background information.** Let staff know about your loved one's personality, sleep routine, medications and communication issues.
- **Set up a health care proxy,** a standard form that enables your loved one to name a health care agent to make medical decisions, if they become unable to do so. A caregiver is not automatically the health care agent. This must be set up while your loved one is capable of making independent decisions. Visit fallonhealth.org to learn more.
- **Ask about a discharge plan.** Prepare for life back home before your loved one is discharged. Is there a new medication regimen? What physical limitations will they have? You may want to have a professional do a home safety evaluation.

Contact any of the following agencies for more information on caregiver services:

Fallon Health's Summit ElderCare Program

fallonhealth.org/summit
1-800-698-7566

National Association of Area Agencies on Aging

n4a.org
1-202-872-0888

Eldercare Locator, Administration on Aging, Department of Health and Human Services

eldercare.acl.gov
1-800-677-1116

Family Caregiver Alliance

caregiver.org
1-800-445-8106

National Alliance for Caregiving

caregiving.org
1-301-718-8444

Caregiver Action Network

caregiveraction.org
1-202-454-3970

National Respite Network and Resource Center

archrespite.org

For more information about caregiving, visit fallonhealth.org, click Healthwise® Knowledgebase under Quick links, and search "caregiving".

