



# Caring for Aging Loved Ones

Being a caregiver for aging parents, even if it's only part-time or for emergencies, is challenging. When do you step in? How do you offer advice without being bossy? What can you do to help prevent emergencies? How do you best handle them when they happen?

"Preparing in advance really helps because it helps you to stay calm," said Tamara Wolske, director of the Center for Aging and Community at the University of Indianapolis. "The more you prepare, the easier it will be to make things simple for yourself and your loved one in a crisis."

## Professional care

Two years ago, Steve Carley's aging mother didn't share with him that she wasn't feeling well. Sara Carley, then 94, ended up in the hospital and rehab for a couple of weeks and then a nursing home — which none of them wanted.

The answer for them was hiring a caregiver with Home Instead Senior Care, a national firm that provides services to seniors to help them remain home.

A caregiver comes every morning and returns in late afternoon. The caregiver cooks, cleans, handles personal care and makes sure Sara Carley takes her medications, which Steve's brother sets out weekly. The caregiver logs the elderly woman's daily activities and physical condition and keeps her medical information up to date.

## Ask questions

Adult children should be aware of key medical information and know how to access it quickly. They need to have a list of the parent's prescriptions, allergies, physicians and contact information and the parent's pharmacy. Senior emergency kits, such as the one offered free online by Home Instead Senior Care

([www.senioremergencykit.com](http://www.senioremergencykit.com)), can provide resources and tracking sheets.

The challenge, says Christopher Callahan, director of the Indiana University Center for Aging and Research, is keeping information updated because medications and health-care providers, for example, change frequently.

Key information, such as medications and doctors' names, can be kept on the refrigerator door or the back of the front door — where ambulance personnel can easily see it. Adult children should collect the information from parents.

Callahan suggests asking them broad questions about their goals of care, such as if they would undergo certain emergency procedures, and their advance directives in case of life-threatening conditions. The right time to broach medical issues varies, depending on the aging parent's health.

"We usually say when the child reaches age 40 or the parent reaches 70, whichever one happens first, that's a good time to talk about what the senior's wishes are and to get an emergency kit in place," Smith said. If a senior is in poor health, she said, it could be done when he or she is in his or her 50s or 60s.

## Keep it conversational

Seniors are usually willing to share such information, but not always. Callahan advises that adult children say they need to know family medical history so they can get cancer screenings. Then they can ease into conversations about the parent's medical issues.

Adult children also need to make clear they're asking questions and collecting information because they care about their parents' well-being and want to handle emergencies well and try to prevent them.

The tone, though, needs to be conversational, says Wolske. It shouldn't sound like an interrogation.

## Get help at Long Hollow

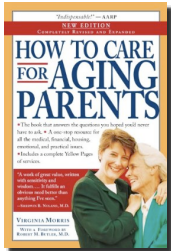
You can speak with a pastor or counselor by scheduling an appointment through the church office at 824.4006.

## RELATED SCRIPTURE

Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8).

Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you (Exodus 20:12).

## RELATED RESOURCES



### How to Care for Aging Parents

Virginia Morris

ISBN 978-0761134268

Combining personal experience with expertise in healthcare and social and political issues, Morris has produced a thoroughly researched, well-organized, and comprehensive manual. The topics covered include the concrete, practical areas such as home care, finances, nursing homes/hospitals, legal issues, and medical/safety concerns as well as the psychosocial areas of handling emotions, dealing with death and dying, sibling conflicts, and spiritual needs. In her discussions, Morris adds useful details such as a suggested list of things to pack for the hospital. Support for the caregiver as well as to the elderly person is covered. Sprinkled throughout the text are agencies, phone numbers, and other reference information.

### [www.CarePages.com](http://www.CarePages.com)

is a free online tool used to give status updates to friends and family when a loved one is facing a sickness or injury. Those across the country can go to the site and get updates day or night without interrupting the loved one's rest or adding to the caregivers "call me" list. It can also be used to inform local friends and family of current needs.