



## A CAREGIVER'S MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **My loved one was just diagnosed with an illness/disease. What should I do next?**

Breathe! Becoming stressed will not change anything or help you make good decisions. Talk with your loved one and share your feelings and concerns. Seek professional advice for what to do next, with your loved one if that is appropriate. You don't need to walk this path alone. Look for support related to your specific situation. VPAS can help you find these resources and a great place to start is with one of [our caregiver support workshops](#).

### **I would like to care for my loved one at home but need some help. What are my options?**

First, assess what you must do yourself and what others can do. Take some time to really think about this and be honest with yourself. Next, list all the other tasks you know of that need to be accomplished. Once you know what kind of help you need you may be able to find help from family, friends or your faith community. You may also need to hire a paid caregiver through an agency. Home care agencies offers non-clinical help, such as meal prep and companionship, while home health agencies provide professional medical assistance. Another difference is that home health is generally covered by Medicare or private insurance while home care is not.

### **I know that it is important to practice self-care as a caregiver. What should I be thinking about?**

You cannot give what you do not have. You cannot pour from an empty cup. You may have heard this before, but it is difficult to apply it to yourself. It may be helpful to think of self-care as an essential part of your role as a caregiver. Make a plan to include healthy eating, physical activity, relaxation and quality sleep into your life. It won't happen all at once and there will be days when your plan falls apart, but make a plan to change one small thing at a time. Start now.

[Taking Care of You: Self Care for Caregivers](#)  
[Caregiver Stress Management – Tips from the Mayo Clinic](#)

### **What are some activities I can suggest for my loved one at home?**

Look for activities that engage your loved one emotionally, mentally and physically. Read a book, poem or short article and talk about it. Go for a walk, step outside, or breath in fresh air from the window. Do balance or chair exercises. [Reminisce and laugh together](#). Go through photos or boxes where you have stored items from the past. Consider making a personal memory book including photos and mementos such as report cards, awards, and meaningful greeting cards. Think about hobbies and past interests and how they could be adapted to still provide enjoyment.

## How can assistive technology help me as a caregiver?

From talking pill organizers to social robots and internet based home monitoring systems, technology can be helpful to caregivers. Medical Alert Pendants let caregivers know when a loved one has fallen. [Digital technology like smartphones, tablets and computers](#) can be purchased that are designed to be easier to use. However, none of these are helpful if your loved one is unable or unwilling to use them. Before purchasing a device of any kind, consider exactly what you need the device to do and if you have the necessary support to maintain it.

## What are some resources for medication management?

Make a list of all medications, who prescribed them, the date they were started, the dosage, and the purpose for taking them. Also include over the counter supplements, creams, drops and suppositories. Medication lists are sometimes available from your provider or online applications like My Chart. Use the same pharmacy for all medications. Your pharmacist has a wealth of knowledge and can answer your questions and watch for potential problems with drug interactions. This is especially important when your loved one is seeing multiple health care providers. Make and keep a routine for taking medications. Use a calendar, notes, or a reminder on your phone to help you remember. It can also be helpful to pair taking medication with a routine activity such as brushing your teeth, making coffee, or watching the news. Use a pill organizer or consider having medications pre-packaged by the pharmacy for each day and time of day. There are a variety of innovative pill boxes including talking, locking, weekly, monthly and more.

## How can I prepare for the future?

- *Regarding health care and end of life wishes:* Make sure that both you and the person you are caring for have prepared the necessary documents. Sometimes this requires difficult conversations but it is so worthwhile and having all the necessary documents completed is truly a gift to everyone involved. Talk to your health care provider about what documents are necessary. Some documents like the ones referenced below add helpful and comforting information that is not required. Once the documents are completed, make sure that health care providers and responsible family members know where they are kept. Here are a few links that may be helpful:

<https://honorringchoices-va.org/>

[The Conversation Project](#)

[The Institute for Human Caring](#)

- *Review your Estate Plan:* A legal plan should contain a high quality power of attorney, a health care power of attorney, up to date legal documents and a plan for finances and properties. Consult your attorney for specific advice.
- *Financial Planning:* Long-term financial planning is important for the security of the caregiver and the patient with a chronic illness. For most people it is helpful to engage the help of a local financial planner. [This information from the Cleveland Clinic](#) can help you get started.

## All this paperwork is overwhelming! Where do I go for help?

Maintaining a caregiver notebook can be helpful for managing paperwork and keeping track of all the details related to your loved one's care. This can be a simple spiral bound notebook or

something pre-printed. [Springwell](#) provides this option free of charge. Commit to keeping all your documents in one place and open your mail as it comes. When you receive a document that you don't understand, seek answers as soon as possible. Call the hospital, insurance company, VPAS, or other professionals who may have answers to the questions you have. Write down your questions in advance of your call and always note the date and time you called and who you spoke with. You may also have a friend or family member who would be happy to help you with these tasks. Remember that you don't have to manage this alone but it is important to ask for help and to be specific about what you need.