



Job Tips for 50+ Workers

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Tips for Working Caregivers

If you are a working caregiver, you know what it's like to be a nonstop juggler, trying to have a life while keeping some balance among responsibilities. Your caregiving role may be hard, even overwhelming, but there are steps you can take that may ease the burden.

Symptoms of Stress

- **Health:** Many working caregivers report health problems, depression, lower productivity on the job, and lost time at work. If you are frequently distracted at work, emotionally drained, and physically exhausted, you are not alone. But do not ignore these symptoms. Recognizing them is the first step to finding solutions.
- **Relationships:** You may also find that you have let your social relationships slide. Many working caregivers cut back on community involvement and spend less time with their own families. If this is happening to you, make every effort to rekindle friendships and reconnect with your community—for example, through church or another group. You will be better able to deal with stress if you have a support network.

Steps You Can Take

- **Talk to your employer.** Let your manager know your needs related to caregiving. Make it clear that you are committed to your job and want to find ways to remain productive.
- **Resist isolation.** Find support in and out of work. Join community caregiver groups for emotional support, and seek out local resources for help. Take advantage of resources, such as *Lotsa Helping Hands.org* to coordinate caregiving tasks within your family and support network.
- **Take care of yourself so that you can take care of others.** As often as you can, get enough sleep. Eat sensibly, use alcohol in moderation, and exercise. Take a break when the pressure gets too great, even if it's just a hot bath or a short walk. Walking with a buddy can cover two needs at once—friendship and exercise.

Know Your Rights

- **Consult with human resources** about what you are entitled to under the law. The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) requires large employers to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid time off with job protection when workers must care for a sick or injured parent. Some states have extended this coverage to include small businesses as well.

Take Advantage of Benefits

- Ask about flexible-work options. This could mean a compressed work week or a modified daily schedule based on need. Job-sharing and telecommuting are also caregiver-friendly options to explore. Many employers offer flexible work options on a case-by-case basis even if there is no formal policy.
- Contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and find out what support services are available, such as counseling on reducing stress and managing your time.
- Many companies offer access to eldercare referral services through an online database or live consultants. Such services reduce the burden of having to do distracting and time-consuming research.

Build a Support System

- Connect with other caregivers at your place of work. It's likely that some of your fellow workers face the same caregiving challenges.
- Put in a request to human resources to sponsor brown bag lunches or an employee resource group to help with caregiving issues. Or you could organize your own, informal group to meet during your lunch hour.
- Thank your coworkers who take on extra assignments or help you with work projects. They are part of your community, too.
- Make sure your manager knows about your accomplishments at work. This will show you are able to deal with multiple priorities.
- Join the Caregiving group on the AARP Online Community to share your story, get support, and connect with other caregivers.
<http://www.aarp.org/community/groups/Caregiving>

Plan for the Future

When it comes to caring for an aging loved one, most families don't have a plan until there is a problem. But as many working caregivers have discovered, the stress of making caregiving arrangements in "crisis mode" can be overwhelming. AARP's **Prepare to Care: A Planning Guide for Families**, is a step-by-step guide for creating a caregiving plan in advance. Even if you have been a caregiver for years, the guide can help you get support and stay organized. Find it at www.aarp.org/foundation (search under "Resources"). Tell your employer about it!



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