

NSLAP WELLNESS TIP: Caring for aging parents and loved ones - Employees as caregivers

The following is an article excerpt from Homewood Human Solutions™, your health and wellness provider.

Caregiving by its nature is not usually something that can be added on top of your daily activities in a neat, stress-free package. It must be integrated with your many other responsibilities and for that you must acquire new knowledge and a different set of skills.

As a starting point, it is important to recognize that each situation is different. You will need to learn as much as you can about your loved ones' circumstances and requirements, so that you can take clear, decisive action when necessary. Whether you're planning ahead or on the fly, it's essential to determine exactly where and how you, as a caregiver, fit in. You need to understand your strengths and weaknesses, what other family members will contribute and what resources you'll need to be able to manage the eldercare situation, your own family and your job successfully.

It used to be that caregivers received little help or recognition in the workplace. While there's still more learning and work to be done, the good news for those facing caregiving today is that: Employers coast to coast are beginning to recognize the challenges of eldercare, the risks of caregiver burnout, and the impact on productivity at the workplace. Employers are much more supportive and many provide educational materials and programs to help ease the burden.

Our governments have also recognized the value and importance of family caregivers and have prioritized the introduction of programs like caregiver leave, tax credits and health promotion and prevention programs for Canadians.

Advance Preparations

If we know a time will come when we have caregiving responsibilities for an elderly person, then the more we do in advance to prepare, the easier it will be for everyone concerned. Here are some things you can do in advance to prepare for a time when you may need to intervene:

Talk with your employer. Find out what the caregiver policies are and what options might be available should you need them. Would they consider staggered hours, job sharing, a shorter work week, a temporary leave of absence or the option to work from home?

Get educated. Ask professionals for advice and assistance; you will get the information and support you need more rapidly and accurately. Read relevant books and magazines and attend educational sessions for workers with aging relatives.

Have the paperwork in order. Arrange to have power of attorney for personal care and property, as well as wills (including wishes for end-of-life care), financial information, keys, and contact information for friends and family readily available. You should also have a record of your parents' Social Insurance Numbers, medical insurance numbers and contact information for medical insurance providers.

Home safety. Consider having a safety assessment of your loved one's home by a trained health professional.

Keep track of medications. Keep a record of all medications and encourage use of the same pharmacy for all prescriptions. Watch for drug interactions and compliance-related issues.

Be vigilant. Monitor your parents' situation by watching for subtle changes in their mental, physical, and emotional health.

Be prepared. Agree on the responsibilities for family members and friends if an emergency occurs.

Contact your EFAP. Find out what services are available through your Employee and Family Assistance Program and use them.

Getting Started As A Caregiver

For employees who find they've taken on additional demands looking after elderly loved ones, there are several steps they should consider:

- **Ask for help.** Be prepared for the fact that being the adult child of an aging parent or a caregiver to a loved one can be stressful. Sometimes during the caregiving journey, energy changes to fatigue, and motivation changes to feelings of being overwhelmed. Thinking you can do it all can lead to burnout after a few months.
- **Be open and honest with the people in your life.** Don't hide your feelings or your eldercare concerns. Be honest and clear, and open to work out a solution that will keep you, your elderly loved one, your family and your employer happy.
- **Learn to balance your time.** Just helping a loved one with simple tasks like grooming, bathing, or dressing can take up to nine hours a week. Escorting your mother or father to medical appointments can take a whole afternoon. Effective time management is essential. Here are a few tips that often help:
 - **Be open to do different things at different times.**
 - **Evaluate your priorities on a weekly basis.**
 - **Divide tasks into what you can do versus what you can delegate.** Recognize that just like childcare, formal caregivers can provide care and homemaking assistance for a loved one, and organize your hours so that they cover for you when it helps you out.
 - **Have a back-up plan for emergency help.**

Take care of yourself

When faced with caregiving, it's important to set limits and let others know where you stand, and what eldercare responsibilities you are prepared to accept.

- **Be aware of your own philosophy on caregiving.** What is your level of comfort with the situation?
- **Are you missing meals, losing sleep, or getting stressed?** Getting respite and/or counsel from professionals is wise.
- **Talk to your doctor, your loved one's doctors, your lawyer, and your accountant.** Contact your EFAP to speak with a counsellor.
- **Consider working with a geriatric care manager** or a case manager to help you arrange care for your elders.
- **Keep yourself in shape,** exercise and make sure you set aside some official 'me' time.

*For additional information, support, resources and counseling on health and wellness, visit the NSLAP website at www.nslap.ca. Please note that **NSLAP** is your "company" name when you register. When*

*you call the NSLAP number at **1-866-299-1299**, (Français: 1-866-398-9505; TTY: 1-888-384-1152) Your call will be answered any time, day or night, 365 days per year.*