

THE WORKING FAMILY caregiver:

TIPS FOR BALANCING CAREER & CAREGIVING

by

DENISE M. BROWN
FOUNDER, CAREGIVING.COM

Published by Early Bird Alert, Your Healthcare Hotline, EarlyBirdAlert.com



Table of Contents

- I. Caregiving is hard. Caregiving and Working is Really Hard***
- II. Tips to Manage the Collision of Caregiving, Colleagues and Career***
- III. My Story: Helping Your Employer Help You***
- IV. Running Your Business While Managing Caregiving***
- VI. Your Caregiving Mission Statement: Shaping your Caregiving Experience***
- VII. The Three Be's of Caregiving***
- VIII. When “What If?” Happens, Be Ready with Your Contingency Plan***
- IX. Your Bad Weather Back-Up***
- X. Closing Thoughts***
- XI. Resources for Caregivers***
- XII. About the Author: Denise M. Brown, Caregiving.com***
- XIII. Early Bird Alert's EasyConnect—Your Free Healthcare Assistant***



“The Working Family Caregiver: Tips for Balancing Career and Caregiving” © Denise M. Brown 2012, All Rights Reserved. Published by Early Bird Alert, 70 Mitchell Blvd., Suite 106, San Rafael, Calif. 94903.

We welcome stories about your caregiving tips and experiences and your suggestions for useful resources for caregivers. Please mail them to our office or send them to editor@earlybirdalert.com.

In 2009, about 42.1 million family caregivers in the U.S. provided care at any given point in time...

I. Caregiving is hard. Caregiving and Working is Really Hard

Susan starts her day at 5 a.m. so she has a few moments alone to write in her journal. Then, it starts: Getting ready for work, waking her mom, waiting for the home health aide, updating the aide on the previous night, checking with her husband about which errands they'll each run at lunch, then finally leaving at 7 a.m.

She leaves the house, but she takes the worries. How much longer will they be able to afford the home health aide? How well will her mother do on the new medications? When will she and her husband have some much-needed private time? When will her boss grow tired of her requests for a longer lunch break and an earlier workday?

Susan did her best to get seven hours of sleep last night, but the worries weigh so heavy that she feels as if she hasn't slept in years.

Susan isn't alone.

In 2009, about 42.1 million family caregivers in the U.S. provided care at any given point in time, and about 61.6 million provided care at some time during the year. ("[Caregiving in the U.S. 2009](#)," published by the National Alliance for Caregiving, [caregiving.org](#).) The estimated economic value of their unpaid contributions was approximately \$450 billion in 2009, up from about \$375 billion in 2007, says AARP Public Policy Institute in its report, "[Valuing the Invaluable: 2011 Update, The Growing Contributions and Costs of Family Caregiving](#)."

When you work while you help a family member, you hold down two full-time jobs. Moreover, that takes its toll. According to "[The 2011 MetLife Study of Caregiving Costs to Working Caregivers: Double Jeopardy for Baby Boomers Caring for Their Parents](#)," the 10 million adult children age 50 and over who work and provide care to a parent are more likely than those who do not provide care to report that their health is fair or poor. The MetLife 2006 Caregiving Cost Study found that at least 6 out of 10 employed family caregivers make work-related adjustments for their caregiving responsibilities: 9% leave the workforce and 10% reduce their hours from full-time to part-time.

Caregiving is hard. Caregiving and working is really hard. We have suggestions, ideas, and resources to help you manage two demanding roles that can complicate life.

(Note: We use the term "caree" to refer to the person receiving your care, such as your parent, spouse, grandparent, or sibling.)

II. Tips to Manage the Collision of Caregiving, Colleagues and Career

Jeff needs to leave early today to pick up his father from the adult day center. Typically, the center provides transportation but today the van driver is out ill leaving the center without a replacement. Jeff's boss has okayed his early departure, but Jeff can feel that patience is running thin, not only from his boss, but also from his colleagues.

Jeff's colleagues are his age (late 20s), but they have no family responsibilities. They say they understand his need for a bit of flexibility in his schedule, but he wonders if they really do. And, today is the day before a huge project is due. Temperaments are particularly testy. It's just bad timing all around.

Holding down a job while providing care can be a tricky balancing act: It can be feel like Your Boss vs. Your Caree. How do you avoid losing a battle with both?

Know that you cannot be discriminated against because of your caregiving role.

Keep in mind:

- 1. Understand your company's benefits and policies.** More companies offer progressive benefits to help employees caring for children and other family members. Benefits may include help finding resources, lunchtime seminars, subsidized back-up care, flextime, and counseling services. Check with your Human Resources department to learn if your company offers any benefits.
- 2. Know that you cannot be discriminated against because of your caregiving role.** The federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has an [article about your rights](#).
- 3. Understand how the Family and Medical Leave Act can help you.** Typically, employers with 50 or more employees must [comply with FMLA](#).
- 4. Communicate effectively with your boss.** Explain the caregiving situation, how you plan to manage it, and ask for feedback. You may start a discussion this way: "My father is not doing well and is now living with me. I have hired help and organized my family to assist to ensure my father is okay while I am here at work. It's possible that I may encounter a crisis because my father's health is unstable. What would be the best way for me to communicate and handle any crisis?" You also may want to ask your boss for suggestions on how to communicate this situation with your co-workers.
- 5. Ask co-workers if they have cared for an aging relative while employed with your current employer or know of others who have.** Ask for suggestions on how they managed the situation.
- 6. Know who can help (professionals, family members, friends, neighbors) and how they can help.** Ask for and accept the help. A geriatric care manager can be a terrific investment to help find resources and oversee care. You can find more information with a visit to the [National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers](#).
- 7. Create a back-up plan.** Ask yourself all the "What If?" questions you can think of. When developing your plan, ask for feedback from family, your friends, your support group, your caregiving coach, and a geriatric care manager. If appropriate, co-workers and management may be able to offer insights. (For more information on creating back-up plans, including one to use during bad weather, [see page 11](#).)
- 8. Set limits with family members and carees about your availability during work hours.** Perhaps you determine you can be available during your lunch hour to field calls or for a few minutes during the afternoon. (Of course, during a crisis—and you may have to define "crisis" as others' definitions may differ from yours—you are always available.)
- 9. Remember the Three Be's of Caregiving (Be Prepared, Be Honest, Be Well).** And, consider writing a Caregiving Mission Statement. ([See page 9](#).)
- 10. Keep two journals—one for your feelings and one about your caree's needs, medications, treatments, likes/dislikes, and care tips.** You will come to value both as treasures.
- 11. Forgive yourself for any bad days; give yourself a fresh start the next day.** In addition, think ahead about five years. When you look back to now, what actions and decisions will make you proud?

III. My Story: Helping Your Employer Help You

By Trish Hughes Kreis

As a legal administrator and caregiver for my disabled brother, my perspective on working caregivers involves being not just the employee, the manager or the working caregiver but all of the above.

As a manager, I am personally very empathetic and supportive of my employees when they have taken on the caregiving role. It is not easy caring for a loved one who has become sick or is declining before our very eyes. Add to that working full-time and perhaps even caring for your own family and you have a recipe for stress that leads not only to the caregiver's own ill health but also to possible mistakes at work.

I sometimes find myself in a juggling act as I work with my employees so they know how important they are to our firm but also so, they don't stress about not being at work while handling caregiving duties. We have hired them because they are good at what they do and we need them to do their jobs.

With more than 40 million caregivers in America alone, we, as employers, need to recognize the effect caregiving duties may have on our employees. Communication is vital when a caregiving situation comes up for one of my employees. It is helpful to have the employee keep me apprised of the situation and any needs for time off or shifting of work hours. It is helpful to know when time off may be needed or if a schedule change is requested but keep in mind, privacy laws make it so it is not necessary to give employers details of the situation.

As a manager, I am the liaison between the employees and the partners; it is important to balance the needs of both. If I can arrange a schedule change (even temporarily) then I will do my best to have it approved. The employee appreciates any flexibility we can give them and we show that we care about our employee and their family. The bonus benefit to this type of arrangement is the loyalty an employee will feel toward the employer willing to work with them.

Loyalty is a two-way street. I have talented people working for me and so I am loyal to them. When I help them with their schedule in order to meet their caregiving duties, they return that loyalty. When my employees become caregivers, I like to think we can work together to come up with a solution that works for both the business and the employee.

As a caregiver, I'm taking care of my youngest brother who has intractable epilepsy (meaning it cannot be controlled). He is physically and cognitively disabled due to a lifetime of seizures, medications, and surgery. I am lucky that my position as manager is somewhat flexible. I have the option of bringing work home or working on a weekend if I have to miss a few hours for Robert's neurology appointments or if I have to take a day off to move him or meet with his care facility. I keep the partners who "need to know" informed about my situation. They have been supportive and understanding.

As an employee, one of the issues I have is being able to take sick time to care for my brother. The definition of "family" under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and the California Family Rights Act (CFRA) includes caring for parents, children, or a spouse. The rules exclude siblings and grandparents at this time and many employers (including mine) follow the FMLA and CFRA definition for our sick time rules.

Since I began caring for Robert, I've had to take vacation days to handle Robert's doctor appointments, helmet fittings, emergency room visits as well as the time spent placing

Loyalty is a two-way street. I have talented people working for me and so I am loyal to them.

Robert in a care facility and staying on top of his quality of care and all that entails (which adds up to a lot of hours!). So while my bank of sick time is maxed out (because I rarely take a sick day), I have exhausted much of my vacation time (and not because I take long, luxurious vacations).

From my perspective as a manager, employee, and caregiver, communication is the most essential tool for balancing work needs and caregiver duties. Working together as a team and keeping each other informed of doctor appointments, work projects, or emergencies goes a long way toward continuing a successful working relationship. It also keeps the stress level down for all involved—one less worry for the family caregiver.

About Trish:

Trish Hughes Kreis is a freelance writer and full-time legal administrator based near Sacramento, Calif. She advocates on behalf of her disabled youngest brother, Robert, in order to keep him as healthy and happy as possible. When not navigating the maze of social services and government programs available to help him, she keeps him entertained by being on the losing end of many card games. She is the author of her first book, "Forever a Caregiver." Visit her at [Robert's Sister](#).

Ask for and accept the help.

IV. Running Your Business While Managing Caregiving

Managing caregiving responsibilities while running a business can make one day seem like two. These tips help the small-business owner involved in a caregiving role:

- 1. Create a Caregiving Mission Statement that integrates your mission for the business.** To help you get started, [visit page 7](#).
- 2. Because caregiving can consume, determine the times during the day that can be devoted to caregiving responsibilities.** For instance, do you devote a few minutes each morning to checking on your caree, time during your lunch to researching options and updating family members, and ending the day with another check-in? What's reasonable for you, your caree, and your business?
- 3. Create a back-up plan in case you need to be away from the business because of caregiving.** Ask yourself all the "What If?" questions you can think of. When developing your plan, ask for feedback from your board of directors, colleagues, employees (if you have them), your business or caregiving coach, and a geriatric care manager. Your back-up plan ensures you are where you need to be while your business still meets the needs of customers and employees.
- 4. Develop a portable office that you can move with you, if needed.** Take your portable office out-of-town, to your caree's home, to your home. And, have a backup of critical information at the ready.
- 5. Know who can help (professionals, family members, friends, neighbors) and how they can help.** Ask for and accept the help. A geriatric care manager can be a terrific investment to help find resources and oversee care. To learn more about geriatric care managers, visit the [National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers](#).
- 6. Prepare for the possibility of a revenue decline.** How can you make personal and professional adjustments? Also, consider, can you sub-contract business if caregiving becomes the priority? Sub-contracting business means you maintain a revenue source and client base but step back on your involvement. Sub-contracting can work if you

use the right sub-contractors (research and check references) and if you communicate effectively with clients.

7. Develop a message to use with clients and employees to use for an extended leave or unexpected change in schedule. When a crisis occurs, you may be choked with emotion. Prepare now for the future, when you may have to explain your situation. Your message may be as simple as, “My mother is not doing well. I’m taking time off to take care of her.” Then, tell employees and clients what they can expect while you’re gone (i.e., tell them what your back-up plan is).

8. Train others to help; keep an open mind when delegating responsibilities. Consider this an opportunity to build your referral network and to empower employees. Communicate your expectations and be available when you can.

Train others to help; keep an open mind when delegating responsibilities.

V. Tips to Help You Decide: Your Career or Caregiving?

You’re facing a big decision—should you quit your job in order to focus solely on your caregiving responsibilities? In the 2011 Family Caregiver Survey conducted by Caregiving.com, 23% of respondents quit a job to become a full-time family caregiver. When faced with whether or not to leave your job give yourself time to research and explore options.

Consider:

1. The budget needed to provide care at home in your absence. Will you better meet the budget if you work and hire in-home care? Or, should you quit your job to stay home and provide the care yourself? Your budget should also include regular breaks for you. If you stay home, budget an amount to spend on services each week so you can take a break. If you continue to work, still budget an amount for regular breaks, whatever you feel you will need. Whether you continue to work or choose to stay home, budget an amount that provides for a two-week annual vacation for you from caregiving.

2. Community services. Are you taking advantage of all of the services available to your relative? Visit [BenefitsCheckUp](#) (a service of the National Council on Aging) to see what services your aging relative is eligible to receive. How would availability of services, services you were not aware of, affect your decision?

3. Your caregiving personality. Will you manage at home, without heading out to the office every day? Do you enjoy the break from caregiving that your job provides? On the other hand, will you be miserable at work worrying about your mom? Alternatively, would a part-time job that allows you to get regular breaks from caregiving while pursuing a career and earning income work best for you?

4. Your future. How will a loss of income affect your future? According to “[The MetLife Study of Caregiving Costs to Working Caregivers: Double Jeopardy for Baby Boomers Caring for Their Parents](#),” average losses in wages and retirement benefits because of caregiving equal \$324,044 for women and \$283,716 for men.

5. Input of other family members, friends, support groups members. What are their concerns for you? What suggestions, insights can they offer?

6. The length of time your caree may need your help. Can you afford to stay home for two years? Five years? As long as your caree needs you? In Caregiving.com’s [2011 Family Caregiver Survey](#), 47% of respondents indicated that they expect their role as family caregiver to last another ten years. Would you be able to manage that long without a salary? With a full-time job?

Your mission statement reflects your caregiving goals and your caregiving personality.

As you know, chronic illness and disability can be deceiving; longevity often cannot be predicted. And, there's no better cure than loving care from a family member. If you stay at home, be sure you understand how long you can manage without a salary. Moreover, start making plans now for when that time comes when you need a salary. Which assisted living facilities are good in your community? Which nursing homes provide the best care? Which home health agencies have staff qualified to care for your caree?

7. Your human resource department. Does your company offer flex time? Sabbaticals? Telecommuting? Job sharing? Family Medical Leave Act? Other options? Would these options make caregiving and working easier?

8. Your current needs. Do you need a short period of time off from work, to find services, to hire in-home caregivers, to remodel your home? Would taking such a leave make it possible for you to accommodate your caree's care needs so that you can return to work full-time? Sometimes, we tend to view solutions as being all or nothing, but the best solution may exist somewhere in between.

9. Assistance of other family members and friends. Would other relatives be willing to share the care, commit to a schedule of caregiving? (I know you're shaking your head "No," but why not ask? If they say no, you're in no worse shape than before you asked.)

10. Your own health. If you quit your job, what provisions will you make for your own medical insurance? Will you have the insurance coverage necessary to ensure you stay healthy?

11. Your peace of mind. Sacrifices are always involved, whether you stay at home, take a part-time job, or work a full-time job. Which sacrifices can you live with?

VI. Your Caregiving Mission Statement: Shaping your Caregiving Experience

Fate may have brought you to this place, this caregiving role. Fate brought about a car accident, a sudden stroke, or just your caree's age-related frailties.

Fate may have waved her hand and tapped you to be the family caregiver. Nevertheless, you can add some controls to your caregiving destiny—with your own caregiving mission statement.

Your mission statement reflects your caregiving goals and your caregiving personality. Your mission statement will serve as a reminder of what you can and cannot do as a family caregiver, as well as what's most important to you and to your caree.

In your mission statement, consider including the following:

1. Your respite schedule. For instance, your respite schedule may include breaks on Wednesday evenings, Sunday afternoons, one weekend every three months, two weeks annually. You'll know best: What breaks do you need to stay on purpose with a healthy perspective?

2. Your respite service plan. In order to take regular breaks, you'll use myriad help in various combinations, from family and friends, to community programs (volunteer respite programs, adult day centers) to various service providers (home health agencies, assisted living facilities, nursing homes).

3. Your ongoing care goals. Your mission statement also reflects your comfort level in continuing to provide care as your caree's care needs increase.

It's essential to set realistic limits on your abilities, respect your boundaries and welcome the best help possible.

4. Your hopes as a family caregiver. Consider—what are your barometers for success as a family caregiver?

5. Your wishes for your caree. You'll want to include your thoughts about quality medical care and dignified interactions with health care professionals.

6. Your caree's wishes. A helpful mission statement also includes your caree's wishes about who he or she wants to receive care from (which family members, which friends), where care can be provided (in his or her home, your home, the nursing home) and how he or she would like to spend his or her last years, months and days. If your caree is unable to communicate these wishes to you, your knowledge of his or her past lifestyle and relationships will help you determine these issues.

Your mission statement is a work in progress. As you change, as your caree changes, as community services change, as your own immediate family changes, so shall your mission statement. Keep each version of your mission statement in your caregiving journal. You'll find it helpful to review and revisit each one.

VII. The Three Be's of Caregiving

It's exhausting. It's sad. It's aggravating.

It's caregiving.

To help you gain control over a situation that seems so out-of-control, consider "The Three Be's of Caregiving." Be Prepared, Be Honest, and Be Well.

Be Prepared:

Once a family member needs intense care, you'll spend time managing one moment to the next. It's hard to carve out the time needed to really explore and research care options: Health care facilities, physicians, specialists, attorneys, financial planners, care managers, community programs, and services. Gather information early on and as soon as possible, so that you have options and choices available when needed.

To stay on track, ask yourself:

- What does the future hold for your caree? What will his or her care needs be? What community services are available to provided the needed care? If in-home will not meet the care needs, which housing options (assisted living facilities, nursing homes) will?
- What can your caree afford in terms of care? If budget restrictions are a concern, what other community programs or services (or state or federal) programs can offset the cost of care?
- What information or training do you need to be a qualified, effective caregiver? Where can you gather the information or learn the caregiving techniques?

Be Honest:

You may find yourself in a position you want to be everything to everyone: Supportive spouse, nurturing parent, devoted caregiver, responsible employee, dependable friend, valuable volunteer. Trying to do it all means you get lost in the shuffle—something has to give. Caregiving will eat up more time and energy than you can ever imagine. In order to manage the experience, it's important to be honest about how much you can handle and for how long and then fill those voids with community programs, family help, and health care providers. It's essential to set realistic limits on your abilities, respect your boundaries and welcome the best help possible.

***...one priority
stays constant:
Your own health.***

To find your limits and boundaries, ask yourself:

- What are your limits as a caregiver? Can family members, friends, or community services fill those voids? If not, what other options are available?
- How long can you afford (emotionally, financially, physically) to provide care in your home or in your caree's home?

Be Well:

Caregiving, which can be a long-term commitment, will take its toll. It's sad to watch a once-vibrant family member struggle to perform basic daily activities. Maintaining a semblance of yourself outside your role, even if only for a few moments each day, and enjoying a true support system (one which honors your role, rather than one that questions it) helps you stay well. In all that you do, one priority stays constant: Your own health.

Consider:

- What interests and hobbies are important to you? How can you maintain these?
- How can you integrate a fitness program into your routine?
- How can you maintain a regular support system?
- How can you release all those negative emotions of caregiving in a healthy way?
- How can you better express your feelings and your beliefs so that family members and friends understand your goals as a family caregiver?
- In what areas do you need help? How can you get the help you need?
- In what ways can you bring joy and laughter into your life (and your caree's) on a regular basis?

VIII. When “What If?” Happens, Be Ready with Your Contingency Plan

What if I'm sick? Who will take care of my caree?

What if I need to help my daughter and her new baby? Who will take care of my caree?

What if I need to go back to work? Who will take care of my caree?

Research is your first step. If you haven't called local social services agencies and services providers (including churches and synagogues) in more than one year, then start by checking with them. Funding changes, personnel changes, goals and missions change. An agency that couldn't help in the past now may have a program that will help you.

Remember: Your goal is to gather as much information as possible. If you learn about a program that you don't think your caree will like...wipe the thought from your head! Gather information about all programs—costs, availability, qualifications, and contact person. The program may not be appropriate now, but may very well be the answers to your prayers down the road.

Next, check with family and friends. In an emergency, what kind of help can they offer? Who will be the second contact in case of an emergency?

Once you've researched all available options in the community (home health agencies, adult day services, assisted living facilities, nursing homes, Meals on Wheels, volunteer

*...one priority
stays constant:
Your own health.*

programs, your house of worship, personal emergency responses, phone check-in services, etc.) and with your family and friends, then make a list. Include agency name, program name, program description, program details (cost, availability, etc.), and agency phone number. You may also want to jot down appropriate times for these services to be used.

For instance, assisted living facilities and nursing homes provide short-term stays, some as short as a weekend. Contact the facilities in your area to learn about their respite policies. In addition, check home health agencies in your community to learn which would be appropriate as back-up to your privately employed aide.

During this process, you also can create your safety net, the net that catches when something falls.

Consider:

Financial safety net

Who manages the finances? Who's the back up? And, who is the check who makes sure finances are in good order?

Day-to-day caregiving

Who can back you up? Who can step in if you are sick? Your back-up can be family, friends, home care workers, adult day centers, Meals on Wheels, assisted living facilities, nursing homes or a combination. Does your back up have the necessary knowledge and training to back you up? In addition, what's your back up for your back up?

Losses

As your caree declines, how will you compensate for the losses? When driving, meal preparation, housekeeping, and other responsibilities can no longer be completed? When caregiving needs intensify? Which services, family members, providers and other options can compensate?

You're out of commission

The flu, unexpected responsibilities, or a sore back makes caregiving that much more difficult. What gadgets and equipment can help?

As a family caregiver, you know that the world can change without warning. You don't want to be caught off guard and without options. Your contingency plan and safety net ensure the well-being of you and your caree just in case "What if" really happens.

IX. Your Bad Weather Back-Up

You watch the snow build from your office window. Or, you watch the storm clouds roll in—you know another doozy is on its way. You're supposed to stop at your mom's house on your way home from work. If you stop to help her, you wonder how you'll ever make it home—if you don't stop to help her...

When bad weather comes between you and your caree, consider these tips:

- 1. Check with your caree's physician and specialists for suggestions** on how to ensure your caree is safe during weather emergencies.
- 2. If your caree receives care from a home health aide** hired by a home care agency, check with the agency's director to determine its protocol during snowstorms. If an aide can't make it to work, will another be assigned? What other options are available?
- 3. If your caree relies on important regular treatments** (dialysis, chemotherapy, wound care, oxygen delivery), work with the service provider to create a safe back-up plan.

Caregiving can seem like such a lonely experience. Remember that you're not alone.

- 4. If you've hired a home care worker privately**, be sure to create a back-up plan if the home care worker must cancel because of weather conditions. (Use this back-up plan year-round, if your home care worker becomes ill, quits, or just doesn't work out.)
- 5. If you have family in the area and they regularly help**, create a "tag team" system that you can use during a weather emergency. Determine which family member will stop at your caree's home, which family member is the back up and how communication between the "tag team" will occur.
- 6. Keep extra caregiving supplies** (incontinence supplies, over-the-counter medications, medications, canned goods, frozen meals) and extra boredom-fighting supplies (books, videos, puzzles, crossword puzzles, stationery) on hand at your caree's house and at your house, just in case.
- 7. Create a space in your caree's house for your own personal supplies** (a change of clothes, toiletries, medications) that you may need in case you must spend the night.
- 8. Use online services to order medications and food** for delivery to your caree's home.
- 9. Check with your caree's town and county about assistance** they offer to homebound frail older adults during weather emergencies. You can call the Administration on Aging's [ElderCare Locator](#) at 1-800-677-1116 for a referral to the Area Agency on Aging in your care recipient's community.
- 10. Ask neighbors of your caree** if they can pitch in by stopping to check on your caree. Let them know how they can reach you in case of an emergency. Be sure someone you trust who lives near your caree's home has an extra set of keys.
- 11. Hire teen-agers in your caree's neighborhood to shovel.**
- 12. If your caree lives in a rural area or has a long walk to the mailbox**, check with the local post office to ensure that mail delivery occurs at your caree's front door.
- 13. If you work**, check with your employer's Work/Life benefit and Human Resources department to learn about your options if you must miss work to stay home with your caree.
- 14. Check with current services that you use** (adult day centers, Meals on Wheels, volunteer programs, phone check-in programs, senior centers) and ask about their protocol during a weather emergency. Ask for their suggestions to fill any voids in care. Be sure also to check with the staff if your caree resides in an assisted living facility or nursing home.

X. Closing Thoughts

Caregiving can seem like such a lonely experience. Remember that you're not alone. Join an online or community support group. And, stay connected with resources, (including the list we've included in the next section), that can help.

I recently heard from Dilys, a family caregiver based in Brazil who blogged on [Caregiving.com](#) about caring for her mom while working as a literature professor. "My mum passed away in December 2010," Dilys said, "but for years I was a caregiver for her and before her for my dad. Right now, I am in an after-the-caregiving time, but with this time, there is such a strong sense of having, as we say in Portuguese, *cumpri minha missão*, "fulfilled my mission, my purpose," that is, of having been faithful and done something that really mattered. It's a feeling of depth, of having made the right choices, of living deeply. Caregiving is really, really hard, but for me it was worth it."

It will be for you, too.

XI. Resources for Caregivers

Family Care Navigator

A state-by-state directory of locate government, nonprofit, and private programs that assist family caregivers.

Powerful Tools for Caregivers

A six-week education program, focusing on the needs of the caregiver, for family and friends who are caring for older adults suffering from stroke, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's disease or similar long-term conditions. Developed in Portland, Ore., by Legacy Caregiver Services. 1-877-701-4999

Dr. Marion

The Dr. Marion Foundation is Everything Elder™! We listen and know the elder care arena, providing a bridge for the generational gap with resolve, results, and respect.

CaregivingClub — Me Time Monday

Sherri Snelling's Me Time Monday Videos and Tip Sheets, provide Caregiving Club expert advice to help caregivers balance self-care while caring for a loved one.

Caregiving.com

Caregiving.com features the blogs of family caregivers, weekly words of comforts, free webinars, and online support groups. Visitors also can join the site's Caregiving Happiness Project, which looks to determine if small, daily changes can add happiness during a difficult time in life.

National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers

A professional Geriatric Care Manager (GCM) is a health and human services specialist who helps families who are caring for older relatives. The GCM is trained and experienced in any of several fields related to care management, including nursing, gerontology, social work, or psychology.

MDLiveCare

A new service where users can engage in real time interactive consultations with healthcare providers over the Internet with the use of a webcam and computer, or telephone. 1-888-632-2738

MyConsult — The Cleveland Clinic

An online medical second opinion service that connects users with the specialty physician expertise they need when they are faced with a serious diagnosis. 1-800-801-2273

The Early Bird Alert Caregiver

A free monthly newsletter with articles, tips, and news aimed at helping caregivers care for themselves. Each issue includes coupons and money-saving offers from trusted companies and brands to ease some of the expenses of providing care for another person.

***Caregiving is really,
really hard, but for
me it was worth it.”
It will be for you, too.***

Caregiving.com features the blogs of family caregivers, weekly words of comforts, free webinars, and online support groups.

Passages in Caregiving

Gail Sheehy's book is a sensitive look at caring for an aging family member. Caring for an elder, once-independent adult—whether a parent, life partner, relative or friend—can be a heartbreaking and backbreaking full-time job, and most often one without pay. Sheehy was her husband's primary caregiver for the last 17 years of his life, a process she believes is a journey that "opens up possibilities for true intimacy and reconnection at the deepest level."

They're Your Parents, Too

Francine Russo's book, "They're Your Parents, Too! How Siblings Can Survive Their Parents' Aging Without Driving Each Other Crazy," is the first to offer siblings a psychological and practical roadmap through this life-changing family transition.

Career Coach: Easing the Stress of Daily Caregiving

The New York Times: "You find yourself having to care for an ill family member while holding down a full-time job. How can you handle both of these demanding duties without feeling overwhelmed?"

Golden Cuisine

A variety of frozen meals that can be ordered online and shipped to a family member by UPS. 1-866-950-9047

XII. About the Author: Denise M. Brown, Caregiving.com



Denise began working with family caregivers in 1990, launching Caregiving.com in 1996. Time magazine, The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, Chicago Tribune, and SmartMoney.com have featured her insights into the family caregiver experience.

Caregiving.com features the blogs of family caregivers, weekly words of comforts, free webinars, and online support groups. Visitors also can join the site's Caregiving Happiness Project, which looks to determine if small, daily changes can add happiness during a difficult time in life. A campaign featuring the stories of former family caregivers called You'll Be Okay debuted on the site in November 2010.

A certified professional coach, Denise helps family caregivers find answers to their questions: Why me? Why now? What now? Her Internet talk show, Your Caregiving Journey, airs several times a week at <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/caregiving>.

Denise has authored four books for family caregivers: "Take Comfort, Reflections of Hope for Caregivers;" "Take Comfort, Too, More Reflections of Hope for Caregivers;" "Good Morning! Sunny Reflections to Start Your Day," and "The Caregiving Years, Six Stages to a Meaningful Journey."

Denise received her coach training in 2004 through IPEC and is certified by the International Coach Federation. She's a board member of two organizations, Guild for the Blind, which helps persons with low vision, and the National Certification Board for Alzheimer Care, which works to standardize care provided to persons with Alzheimer's by professional caregivers. She's a former board member of Chicago Coach Federation, which represents life, business, and executive coaches.

Write to Denise at (denise@caregiving.com) or [Twitter \(@caregiving\)](https://twitter.com/caregiving).

XIII. Early Bird Alert's EasyConnect— Your *Free* Healthcare Assistant

EasyConnect from Early Bird Alert (EBA) makes it easier for people to take better care of their health.

EasyConnect puts your caree one-button touch away from immediate, non-emergency contact with their doctors, pharmacies, caregivers, case managers, and transportation services. It helps to remind them to take your prescriptions and manage the medical services that are vital to their health and well-being.

Properly used, it may help you, a caregiver, and healthcare professionals know when patients aren't following their care regimens.

Best of all, EBA's EasyConnect is available free-of-charge from EBA's healthcare partners. It promotes independent living for people with chronic illnesses, and creates opportunities for more personalized patient-directed care that can result in reduced healthcare costs.

EasyConnect is an App for Smartphones, Tablets, PCs, Internet TVs. EasyConnect also works with conventional home and cell phones.

[Get EasyConnect free for someone you care for.](#)

Follow us on