

Caregiving When You Work

Handling work and caregiving responsibilities is never easy. Worldwide, the number of caregivers is rising every year and caregivers often must balance work, family, and other responsibilities as well as their caregiving role. Explore the challenges that working caregivers might face and learn ways to help balance these important responsibilities.



Caring for a Loved One—A Common Experience

- More than 250 million people around the world are caregivers, with an estimated 53 million in the United States alone.
- Women predominantly take on the caregiving role. Worldwide, it is estimated between 57% to 81% of all caregivers of the elderly are women, according to a study published by the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI). Cultural differences play a role in this to varying degrees across the globe.
- Many young people are caregivers. Although the average age for caregiving is age 50 to 64, many caregivers are in their 20s or 30s. And the demand on young people for this role is growing as the population of older adults increases.

The Realities of Being a Working Caregiver

Most people underestimate how much time they will spend as caregivers. While working full-time and getting your own needs met—let alone providing care—you may not realize how many hours you are putting into caregiving for a relative, but the hours will add up. For one week, write down the hours you spend providing care and see if it matches your estimate. This will give you clarity and choice over how you best plan your time.

Caregiving affects physical and mental health. Studies show that caregivers experience higher levels of depressive symptoms and stress than non-caregivers. Caregivers also have reported worsening physical health ranging from complaints such as headaches to increased risk for heart disease.

Keeping these realities in mind can help you plan for the challenges you may face as a working caregiver. For example, because so many people underestimate how much time they will spend as caregivers, you may need to develop both a short- and a long-term plan for combining work and caregiving.

Juggling Your Many Responsibilities

One of your biggest tasks as a caregiver who works is finding a way to manage your work and caregiving responsibilities so that you can give your best to both. Here are some tips:

- **Set priorities.** Identify the caregiving tasks that are most important and schedule time for them in your calendar. Don't wait until a crisis occurs to decide which commitments you can reduce or eliminate, because you may not be thinking as clearly then.
- **Learn to delegate.** Even if you can meet all your relative's needs on your own, you'll provide better care if you take breaks from your responsibilities. Delegating some of the tasks of caregiving will help you avoid burnout and maintain the energy you need to meet all your responsibilities. It will ease the resentment that comes from

taking on too much and will enhance the relationship with the person you are caregiving for and the rest of the family.

- **Develop a system for meeting your relative's needs.** Consider making a list of your relative's needs (such as visits, doctors' appointments, and help with shopping). Include the times when they occur and spaces for people to sign up to help with them. Copy the list and send it to everyone who might be able to help.
- **Keep good records.** Set up a system to organize papers related to your relative's care—for example, transportation, adult day care, medical bills, and various legal documents—so you'll always be able to find what you need. You can use folders, an accordion file, or a three-ring binder and make sure you have a dedicated notebook to write down information and keep track of your relative's medical history, current medical conditions, and medications to give to the health care provider or emergency medical personnel if needed. Write down any questions you have of medical professionals as your time with them will be limited.
- **Plan for emergencies.** It may take weeks or even months for appointments with professionals, such as health care providers or elder law attorneys. If your relative's doctor has said that they may soon need to see a specialist, call now to find out the waiting times and make an appointment. And keep in mind that planning includes knowing your relative's end-of-life decisions. Encourage your relative to complete such documents as a living will and a durable power of attorney for both medical and financial decisions, and a will.
- **Get ideas from other working caregivers.** Talk with them about your challenges and how they might resolve them. You may also get helpful ideas from the Family Caregiver Alliance (<https://www.caregiver.org/connecting-caregivers/support-groups/>).
- **Talk to your work manager or human resources (HR) representative.** You may have access to benefits that would make it easier for you to juggle your work and caregiving needs, such as flexible working or job-sharing. Avoid waiting until a crisis occurs to ask about these, so you'll have enough time to think about which might work best for you. You can also contact Caterpillar's Global Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for referrals and support (eap.cat.com).

Navigating Your Work and Caregiving

A conversation with your manager can help you find solutions to your caregiving challenges. If that doesn't feel comfortable, begin by talking with your HR department.

- **Have the conversation right away if your caregiving has started to affect your work or you feel it will soon.** It's essential to discuss with your manager if your caregiving tasks have caused you to miss a deadline, come in late or leave early, or if those tasks have affected your ability to meet an important responsibility at work. Your manager may know of helpful resources offered by your employer or be able to adjust your responsibilities so that all the work gets done on time.
- **Be aware that you don't have to share personal or medical details.** Tell your manager only as much as you feel comfortable sharing. If your mother has a life-threatening condition that you'd prefer not to discuss, it's fine to say just that she has a serious illness that may require you to sometimes miss work.
- **Be clear about what you think you will need to meet your responsibilities at work.** Take time to think about this before you discuss it with your manager. Will you need to come in late or leave early at times? Would it make sense to try a flexible work arrangement for a few months? Or could you meet your responsibilities if a coworker or temporary replacement took over some duties? Could you do your job from home temporarily?
- **Be upfront.** Avoid making promises that may be impossible to keep. If you're unsure of being able to meet a deadline or attend an important meeting, say so.

- **Talk about what to tell your coworkers about the situation.** If you have concerns about your privacy, discuss them with your manager so that the two of you can plan what to say to others about your caregiving responsibilities.
- **Keep your manager informed of changes that may affect your ability to meet all your responsibilities.** Let them know promptly if the situation changes so that they can make any needed adjustments to the plan you've worked out for getting the work done.

Taking Care of Yourself

Balancing life, work, and caregiving is a challenge that can affect your own health and wellbeing. You'll be able to provide better care if you take good care of yourself as well. Here are some guidelines that may help you make your own health a priority:

- **Maintain your usual good health routines.** Eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly, and get seven to nine hours of sleep every night to maintain your energy.
- **Use annual leave to recharge.** Think of your time off as a break not just from work, but, if possible, from caregiving.
- **Look into respite care.** Respite care gives you a temporary break from caregiving responsibilities. Some long-term care facilities provide overnight respite care for limited periods of time. You could also arrange for a relative to provide respite care for a shorter period, such as a few hours each weekend while you visit a park or have lunch with a friend. Learn more about respite care and find links to programs in your community on the site for the ARCH National Respite Network (archrespite.org).
- **Look into any leave laws** under which leave may be covered (such as the U.S. Family and Medical Leave Act) if you need to provide extended care. Your HR department can give you information and can help you understand any government regulations that may apply to your situation.
- **Contact Caterpillar's Global Employee Assistance Program (EAP).** The EAP has additional resources on managing stress, finding local services, dealing with housing, staying on top of health issues, and coping with job-related issues you may face as a working caregiver. Visit CaterpillarEAP.com or call 866-CAT(228)-0565.

Jennifer Novak, LICSW – Eldercare Consultant
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