



The Family Caregiver Starter Kit

Caregiving with Confidence:
Practical Strategies for the Path Ahead





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Start with Confidence

Caring for someone you love is one of the most important jobs you'll ever do. It can also be one of the hardest. This guide gives you easy tools to help. In school, we got good grades for doing well. But caregiving doesn't work that way. There's no perfect score. There's no one right way to do things. The key is to plan ahead and keep your loved one safe and fulfilled. Trust that you're doing your best every day. Your confidence will grow as you learn.

Whether you're just starting or find yourself restarting the caregiving journey, this kit helps you:

- Feel prepared
- Make routines that work
- Know what to ask at appointments
- Plan for emergencies
- Ask for help
- Take care of yourself

Bring this guide with you as you care for your loved one. How you give care might look different in 3 weeks or 3 years. Give yourself permission to stop things that no longer work for you or your loved one. Things will always change in caregiving. Come back to this guide whenever you need it. Each time, it will meet you at a different place on your journey.



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Your First Steps

Create Your Care Corner

Have both physical and electronic copies of important documents including:

- Responses to the questions above
- Insurance cards
- Medication lists
- Doctor's information
- Emergency contacts



Before You Begin

Start by gathering basic information about your loved one. This will save time and help in emergencies. Write down:

- Health conditions
- Medications (name, dose, when to take)
- Primary doctor and clinic info
- Health insurance details
- Home address
- Social security number
- The daily activities they can do independently
- The daily activities that require assistance

Pick one spot in your home to keep the physical copies, such as a drawer, bin, binder, or filing cabinet.

Create a dedicated folder on your computer desktop or on a jump drive for all electronic copies of the documents. Consider sharing electronic copies of these important documents with other trusted family members or neighbors.

First Week Checklist

- Make a full medication list
- Copy insurance cards
- Create an emergency contact list
- Set up a simple daily routine
- Identify one backup helper

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Daily Care Basics

Simple Routines Help Everyone

Keep things simple at first then adjust, add details, or customize by day as you go.

Morning Ideas

- Help with dressing
- Give morning meds
- Eat breakfast
- Talk about the day
- Do light movement (e.g. outdoor time, light stretching, brief walk)

Evening Ideas

- Eat dinner
- Give evening meds
- Wind down (TV, music, reading)
- Help with bedtime routine



Daily Checklist

Morning

Medications given
Breakfast eaten
Dressed and clean
Health check-in (how is your loved one feeling today?)

Afternoon

Medications given
Lunch eaten
Light activity or rest
Symptom check-in
(any new symptoms or changes?)

Evening

Medications given
Dinner eaten
Bedtime routine done
Tomorrow's plan in place

Methods for Tracking Medications

- Use a pill organizer
- Keep a full list of all medications (medication name, dose, time)
- Set alarms if needed
- Check off each dose when given
- Store meds in one place (if possible)



Weekly Planning

Weekly Planner Tips

Planning helps avoid stress for both you and your loved one. A schedule and routine are particularly important if your loved one has dementia or memory loss. Using a digital calendar ensures you will always have your schedule on hand; however, many caregivers prefer a notebook or physical planner to stay on track.

What to Plan Each Week

- Appointments
- Medication refills
- Meals and errands
- Time for yourself

Doctor Visit Checklist

Before any visit:

Write down questions or recent changes in symptoms or behaviors

Always bring:

An updated medication list

Insurance cards

A notebook and pen

Arrive early

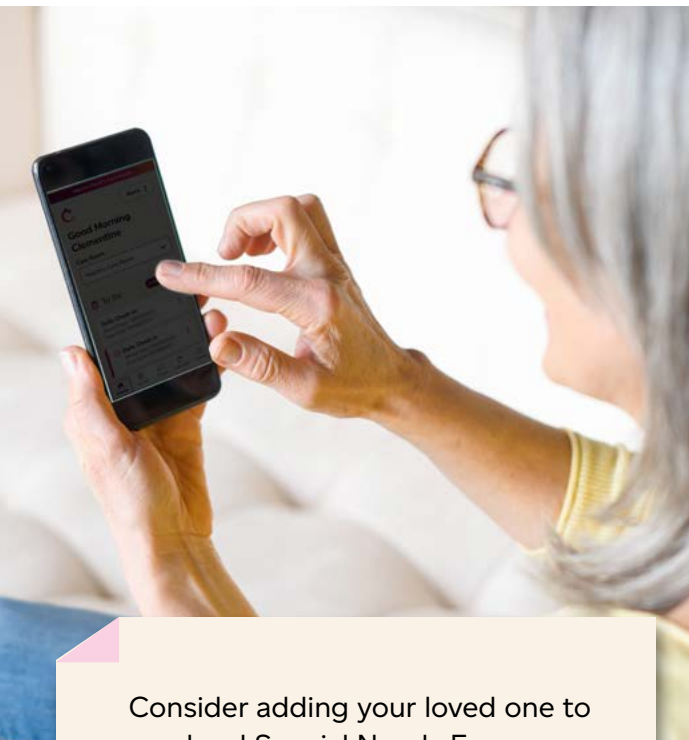
Smart Questions to Ask at Each Appointment

- Is the treatment working?
- What side effects should I watch for?
- When do we come back?
- Are there daily tasks to avoid?
- Are there any changes to medications?

Emergency Prep

Develop an Emergency Action Plan

Using one of the many resources available online, such as the [Red Cross' Make a Plan](#) site, build out an emergency action plan customized to your loved one's needs. Share this plan with other family members, friends, or neighbors to ensure those your loved one trusts are as prepared as you are!



Consider adding your loved one to your local Special Needs Emergency Registry/Vulnerable Population Registry if available. Being on this list can allow your loved one access to priority services and assistance should an emergency happen in their city.

Emergency Info Sheet

Keep this info in 2-3 places: fridge, your bag, and your phone.

Need to Know Emergency Info:

- 911 and hospital contact
- Primary doctor and pharmacy info
- Emergency family contacts
- Medical conditions and allergies
- Current medications and insurance details

Emergency Bag Checklist

Always have an emergency bag packed and ready to go at a moment's notice, especially if you live in areas with hurricanes or wildfire where quick evacuations can happen. Include the following:

- Copy of current medication list
- Scanned copy of insurance cards
- Physical list of emergency contacts
- Copies of important medical documents
- 1-2 days of clothes, including warm weather attire like sweatshirts, sweaters, hats, mittens, or jackets, depending on your climate
- Snacks and gallons of water
- Blanket
- Phone charger and/or solar charger

Build a Support Team

You Shouldn't Do This Alone

Even if you're the primary caregiver, others can contribute in big and small ways, whether being a backup caregiver for you, an emergency contact if something happens when you're not accessible, or simply checking in with you or your loved one to talk and offer support.

Who Might Help?

- Family
- Friends
- Neighbors
- Religious community members
- Professional caregivers
- Local or online support groups, like those offered by the [Alzheimer's Association](#), [Caregiver Nation](#) or through your city's community-based programming.

How to Ask for Help

Be clear and specific:

Instead of: "I need help."

Say: "Can you stay with Mom Tuesday while I go to the store?"

Who Can Help With What

Transportation

1. _____
2. _____

Meals

1. _____
2. _____

Errands/Groceries

1. _____
2. _____

Sitting with Loved One

1. _____
2. _____

Emergency Backup

1. _____
2. _____

Take Care of You

Why Self-Care Matters

You can't care well for others if you're running on empty. When you feel rested and supported, it's easier to handle whatever comes your way. Caregiving can be unpredictable, but focusing on yourself can help you stay steady, respond with patience, and feel more confident in the care you give.

Self-Care Plan

Daily: I will

Weekly: I will

Monthly: I will

People who can support me:

Easy Self-Care Ideas



5 Minutes

- Deep breaths
- Step outside
- Stretch
- Call a friend

15 Minutes

- Take a walk
- Read a book
- Write in a journal



30+ Minutes

- Exercise
- Nap
- Have coffee with a friend

Warning Signs You Need a Break

- Always tired
- Getting sick more often
- Feeling upset or angry all the time
- Not sleeping or eating well
- Losing interest in things you enjoy

Stress and Emotions

It's Okay to Feel a Lot

Caregiving is full of deep feelings—love, stress, guilt, sadness, even anger. That's normal. But if your emotions start to take over, it might be time to step back and find support, so you don't feel like you're on an emotional rollercoaster.

Quick Stress Relief Tools

With these quick, simple, and accessible practices, you can find peace, calm, and a quiet mind.



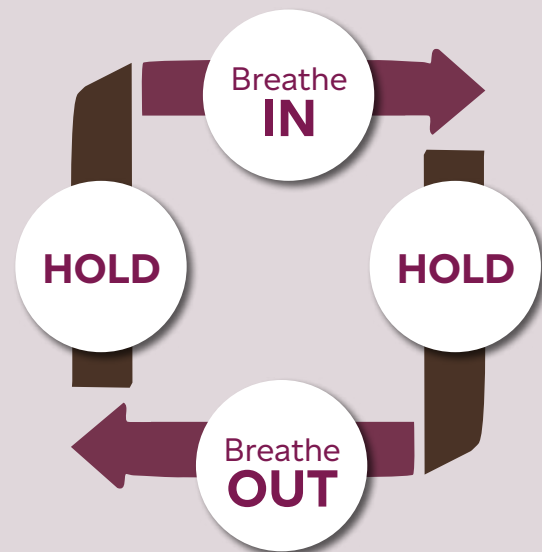
Grounding Technique

Take a few minutes to recenter yourself if things are feeling out of your control or chaotic. Use each of your senses and identify:

- 5 things you see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you hear
- 2 things you smell
- 1 thing you taste



Box Breathing



- Calm your nervous system by stabilizing your breathing.
- Inhale 4 seconds → Hold 4 → Exhale 6 seconds → Hold 4 → Repeat 5x

When to Seek Professional Support

- Feeling hopeless or overwhelmed daily
- Sensing significant shifts with your eating or sleeping habits that last more than a couple days (too much or too little)
- Using alcohol or pills to cope
- Arguing often with others
- Feeling like you or your loved one are not safe

Adjusting to Change

Seasons and Routines Shift

As the seasons change, your caregiving routine might need to change too. New weather, daylight hours, and activities can affect your loved one's health, safety, and comfort. Mark your calendar quarterly so you are ready to welcome each changing season. Below are ways you can prepare ahead of each season:

Spring Prep

- Watch for allergies and pollen
- Spring-clean the care space
- Check medical equipment for wear
- Get ready for more time outdoors
- Schedule any needed checkups
- Store winter clothing and bring out warm-weather attire
- Prepare emergency supplies for hurricane or wildfire season (location dependent)

Summer Prep

- Prevent heat-related illness (watch for signs of overheating)
- Always keep water nearby and stay hydrated
- Use sunscreen, SPF breathable clothing, sun hats if going outside
- Plan outings during cooler parts of the day
- Check the home for proper air flow or AC

Fall Prep

- Schedule flu shots, and other vaccines
- Store summer clothing and bring out warmer clothing
- Get heating systems checked
- Start planning for holidays
- Clear leaves from walkways to avoid slipping
- Check outdoor lighting and replace bulbs if needed

Winter Prep

- Stock up on food, meds, and blankets
- Prepare emergency supplies for blizzard conditions, including extra winter clothing and blankets in your vehicle (location dependent)
- Keep walkways clear of snow and ice
- Have a backup power or heating plan
- Watch for signs of seasonal depression
- Plan indoor activities to stay engaged

When Things Go Wrong



Hard Days Happen

On tough days:

- Focus on basics: safety, meds, meals
- Lower your expectations
- Call a friend or helper
- Rest when you can
- Practice mindfulness or breathing exercises to calm your mind

When There's a Setback

- Stay calm
- Focus on what's needed right now
- Call in backup support
- Adjust your routine
- Remember this won't last forever

If Your Loved One Resists Help

Common phrases:

“I don't need help.”

“I'm fine on my own.”

“I won't take that medicine.”

Stay calm

Try: Step into another room or outside for a few minutes and recenter yourself. Come back to the situation with a clear mind.

Give choices

Try: “Would you rather do it now and get it done with or in ten minutes?”

Explain why it matters

Try: “My top priority is your safety and health. It's really important that you...”

Respect their independence

Try: “I'll stand here in case you need me.”

Choose your battles

Try: “Okay. We can talk about that a little later.”

Planning Ahead

Important Conversations to Have

Some of the most important conversations to have are often the most difficult. Acknowledging progressing diseases, addressing growing care needs, and talking through end-of-life planning are among those. Start at the beginning, listen intently, and document their answers. Then you can better understand your loved one's desires and match it with what is possible.

How to Start the Talk

- Pick a calm time
- Talk about smaller things first
- Listen more than you talk
- Don't try to cover everything at once
- Write things down

Care Requests

- What care do they want?
- Where do they want to live?
- Who should help with decisions?
- What medical care do they want or not want?

Legal & Financial Documents to Gather

Will

Power of attorney

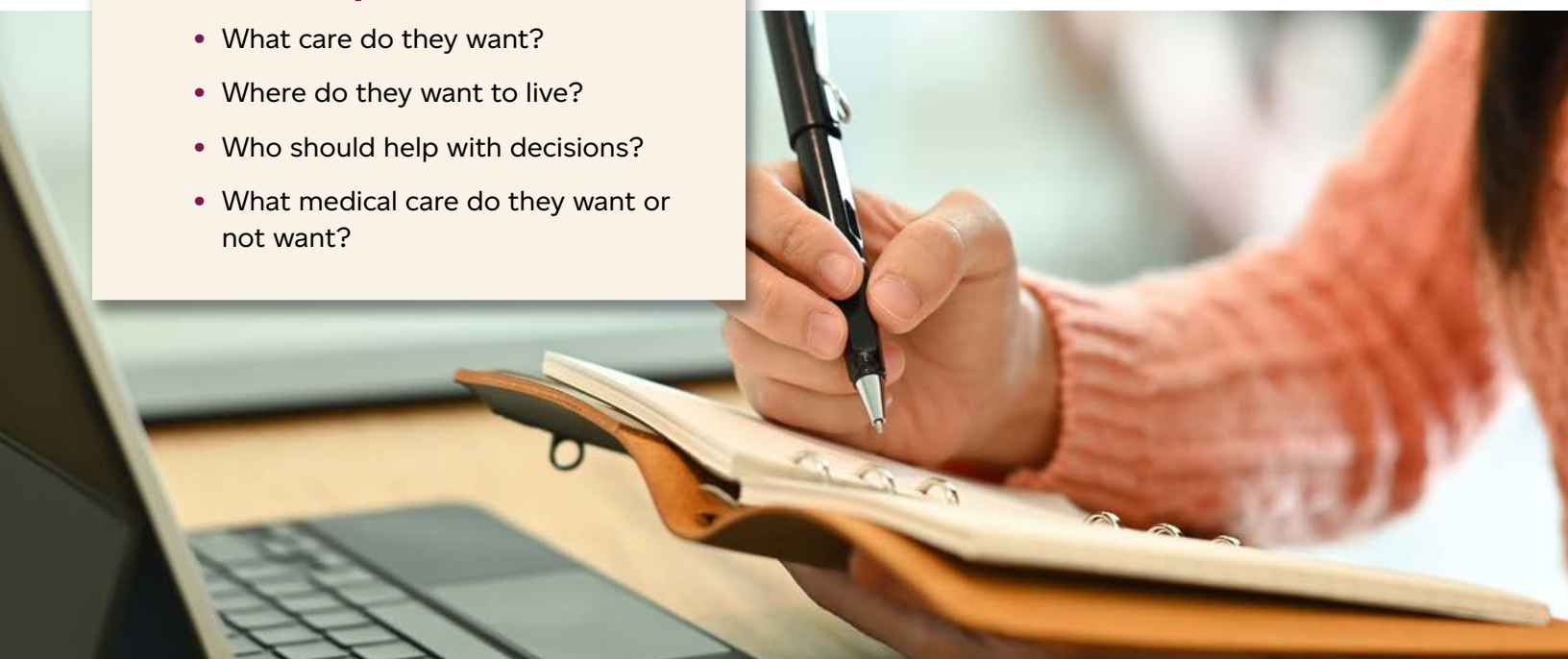
Healthcare directive

Insurance info

Bank account details

Who Can Help

- Elder law attorney
- Social worker
- Financial planner
- Local Area Agency on Aging



Tools & Trackers

You can print or copy these for daily and weekly use.

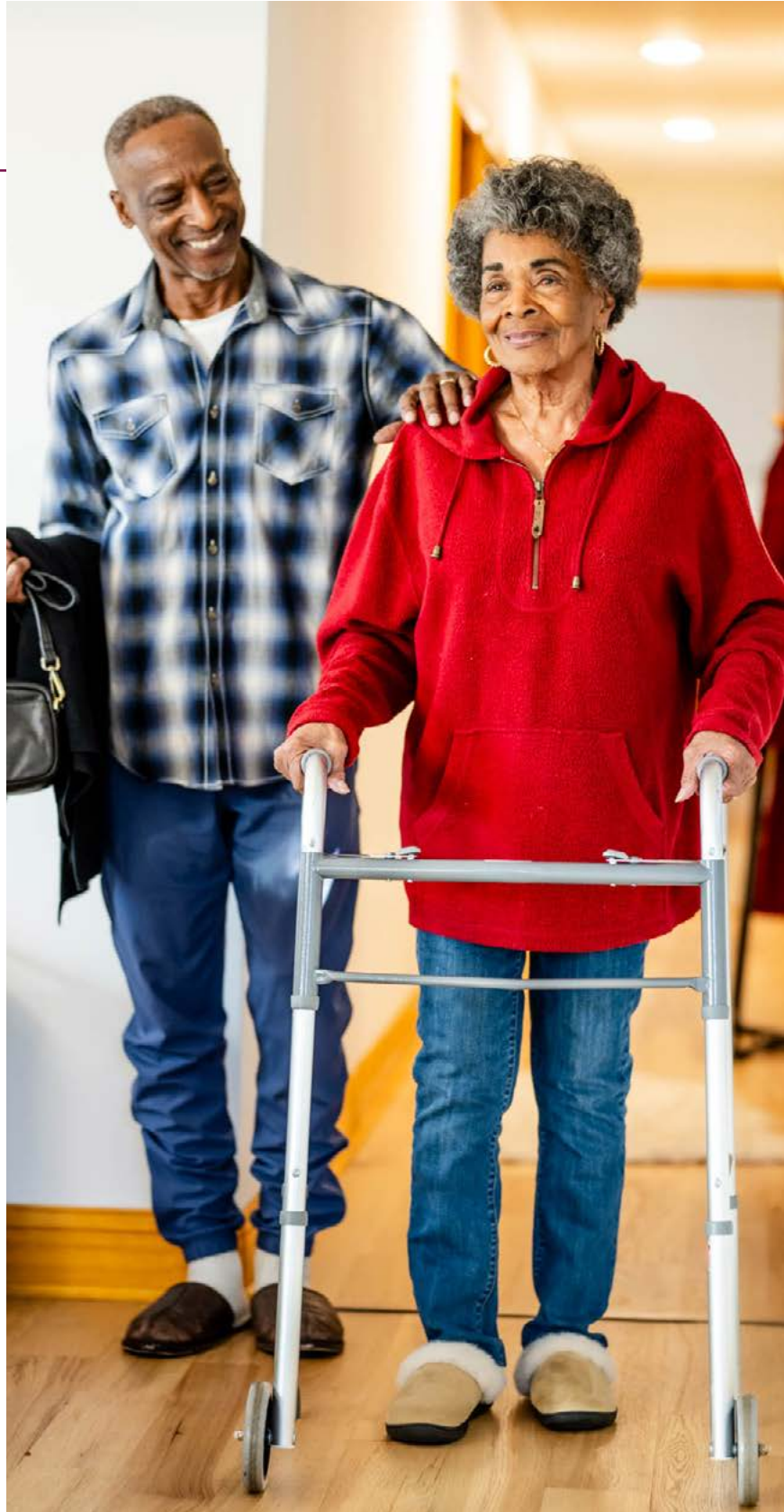
- [Daily care checklist](#)
- [Medication tracker](#)
- [Appointment log](#)
- [Emergency plan](#)
- [Weekly care planner](#)
- [Self-care plan](#)

Where to Get Help

- **Eldercare Locator:**
1-800-677-1116 | eldercare.acl.gov
- **AARP Caregiving:**
aarp.org/caregiving
- **National Alliance for Caregiving:**
www.caregiving.org
- **Alzheimer's Association:**
1-800-272-3900 | alz.org

Support Groups

- Online forums
- Local support meetings
- Condition-specific groups



You're Not Alone

Caregiving can feel overwhelming—but you don't have to figure it all out at once, and you don't have to do it alone.

This guide gives you a starting point:

- Tools to get organized
- Routines that make daily care easier
- Checklists for planning and emergencies
- Tips for managing stress and asking for help
- Reminders to care for yourself, too

You're learning. You're doing your best. And that's enough. The goal is to be present and participate in their care, not to be perfect.

There will be good days, hard days, and everything in between. When things get tough, come back to this guide. Use it as a reset. Start small. Ask for help.

And most importantly, remember:

You're making a difference every single day.

Your loved one is lucky to have you.

You've got this.



Taking the First Step

When it comes to caring for yourself, you don't have to do it alone.

Careforth can provide you with a personalized care coach and disease-specific support resources to help you care for yourself and your loved one.

CONTACT US TODAY