

Stress of the long distance caregiver

Nearly 5 million Americans who provide care to older family members are considered long-distance caregivers



About NuevaCare

NuevaCare provides non-medical home care services to seniors who need assistance with their activities of daily living.

Our services include:

- . Medication reminders
- . Respite care
- . Grocery shopping
- . Errands & household duties
- . Transportation
- . Supervise walking and fall prevention
- . Light housekeeping
- . Laundry/ironing & changing bed linens
- . Socialization & companionship
- . Alzheimer's/Dementia support
- . Ambulation assistance
- . Incontinence support
- . Bathing & grooming supervision
- . Meal planning & preparation
- . Hygiene assistance
- . Dressing assistance

An estimated 15 percent of the 34 million Americans who care for older family members are Long Distance Caregivers, defined as living an hour or more away from their relative. Serving in such a capacity can have an impact on one's family life, finances and career, not to mention emotional well-being.

Rachel lives with her family about an hour and a half away from her widowed father, Stan. Until recently, the distance was not a problem. Ever since her mother had died, Rachel would meet her dad monthly for dinner at a restaurant located halfway between them, and he would often drive to her home for holidays.

This changed abruptly when Stan suffered the first of several minor strokes. He could no longer drive, so the monthly dinners ended. Although Stan always reassured his daughter on the phone that he was fine, she would feel uneasy whenever the call ended. He sounded

a little too subdued, a little less responsive. He acted forgetful at times, and sometimes sounded depressed. Things he once liked to do, play golf, take long walks, he now avoided. She worried about whether he was eating properly, and if he would suffer another, and more serious stroke.

In addition, she found herself regularly on the phone with his doctor. She started taking days off from work to drive Stan to the doctor, or simply to check up on him. These were days she could not afford to lose.

She knew there was no way Stan would ever agree to live with them or choose to give up the house and live in a senior facility. Decisions needed to be made, and soon, and she wasn't sure what to do.

Rachel's situation is hardly unique, as it is the typical life of the long distance caregiver. Living an hour or more away from their loved one,

Stress of the long distance caregiver

continued...

they feel responsible for their relative's health and well-being, and often face difficult and complex challenges.

According to a study on Long-Distance Caregiving conducted by the National Alliance for Caregiving in collaboration with AARP, 15% of the estimated 34 million Americans who provide care to older family members are considered long-distance caregivers, defined as living an hour or more away.

Living away from an aging parent can have an impact on one's family life, finances and career, not to mention emotional well-being. It often requires caregivers to miss work to care for their relatives, manage and supervise paid care providers from a distance, and feel left out of decisions made by health care professionals or others.

The survey also learned the following about long-distance caregivers:

- Despite living an average distance of 450 miles or nearly 7 1/2 hours away from the individual they care for, more than half say they visit at least a few times monthly.
- Nearly a quarter of the long distance caregivers are the only or primary caregiver.
- Nearly three quarters help their loved one with the instrumental Activities of Daily Living (ADLs), such as transportation, grocery shopping, managing finances or medications, or cooking and on average, spend 22 hours a month doing this.
- Almost 40% also provide help with the more intense ADLs, such as bathing, dressing, feeding and toileting for an average of 12 hours per month.
- Nearly 80% work either full or part-time, and more than 40% have had to rearrange their work schedules in order to perform their caregiving responsibilities. Furthermore, 36% reported missing days or work and 12% have taken a leave of absence.

What Can Be Done

- If you are the primary caregiver, identify someone you can trust to be your eyes and ears when you're not available. This means counting on a trusted neighbor or friend, or hiring a home health care agency. Professional home care services can range from non-medical care (for companionship, shopping, cleaning, etc.) for several hours a week, to live-in medical services (as provided by a trained home health aide).
- Find senior resources located near the loved one to identify available programs. These may range from Meals on Wheels to adult day care.
- Pull together a list of prescriptions and over-the-counter medications used by your loved one, including doses and schedules. With many elderly simultaneously taking an average of six different prescription drugs and three or four over-the-counter products, they could be at risk for adverse interactions. This list should be provided to both the individual and the caregiver.
- Make your visits count by looking for possible safety hazards in the home. With visits at a premium, take advantage of them by looking for accidents waiting to happen – e.g. loose rugs, faulty steps, poor lighting, unsafe clutter.
- Have your relative create an advanced directive stating his or her healthcare treatment preferences. This written document can help a family avoid conflicts that can occur should there be any disagreements over future treatment decisions.
- Consider the use of a Personal Emergency Response System. This provides the loved one with a pendant to be worn at all times that will trigger a call to an emergency vehicle and the caregiver in case of a fall, illness or accident.