

# *Disability Campaign.org*

## How to Care for Your Caregivers



Image: Joni Eareckson Tada and one of her caregivers checking Joni's schedule

Caregivers may be relatives, friends, or professionals, but they all put effort into serving you and caring for your needs. Whether your caregiver is paid or not, it's important that you show him or her appreciation. This will help strengthen your relationship.

Below are ways in which you can demonstrate to your caregivers that you care for them.

### *Ways to care for your caregiver:*

- 1. Learn about your caregiver's needs.** Be intentional about focusing on her needs. Remember her birthday; give small, vocational gifts; organize an annual "Caregiving Appreciation Dinner" or lunch for those who help you.
- 2. Demonstrate genuine interest in your caregiver's family.** Family matters to people, and if your caregiver has a wife, children, or elderly parents, he needs to care for them, too. If he has children, ask about how they are doing in school. Consider that with a family, he may appreciate time off to spend with his loved ones or attend a family gathering.

3. **Be very specific when describing exactly what you expect.** Talk with your caregiver about what kinds of duties she will be assigned, how long her help will be required, etc. Be mindful of your tone of voice when you say things and be careful not to sound bossy or demanding.
4. **Consider having more than one caregiver.** Caring for someone else is a large responsibility. Having more than one caregiver will prevent burnout for your caregiver (especially spouse caregivers); furthermore, this will allow you to have a backup person in case your primary caregiver is unavailable. Speak to your extended family, friends, or contact your place of faith or a local health organization to see if anyone else is interested in helping you with your care routines. If possible, spread the responsibilities among a group of people.
5. **Be patient when training a new caregiver.** Your caregiver may be familiar with your condition or illness, but that does not mean that he will know how to do everything exactly the way you need it to be done. Even experienced caregivers will need to learn what works best for you. Consider providing him with training materials, having him see your previous caregiver work with you, and remind him he can ask questions that will help him be a better caregiver.
6. **Be a grateful person.** People won't want to volunteer their help if they feel they won't be appreciated. Even paid caregivers desire to feel valued (we all do). Your caregiver needs to be affirmed and thanked. That doesn't mean sweet-talk or empty flattery; point out positive characteristics in her life that you can nurture (for example: "You are always one step ahead of me when I need something; that shows you are an incredibly thoughtful person ... Thank you for that.").
7. **Be flexible.** Your caregiver is not going to do things exactly the way a family member does them are exactly the way you would like them to be done. Try to be gracious and flexible with people's limitations.
8. **Keep a sense of humor.** Things will go wrong, so learn not to take these circumstances too seriously. Nothing helps an embarrassing or impossible moment more than humor.



Image: StHelenaHospitals.org.

9. **Take care of yourself.** Yes, your caregiver is there to offer you help; however, you can offer her help by caring for yourself. For example, if your doctor has been advising you to lose weight and your caregiver is required to lift you, shedding a few pounds would be good for you — and considerate of your caregiver. Keep your medical records and doctor's phone numbers organized or at least, in one place. This will reduce her stress if she were to need to contact your physician or check any indications for prescriptions.
10. **Take time to enjoy the friendship.** Don't see your caregiver as someone who is simply there to care for your needs. Remember, your caregiver is a person. Consider this an opportunity to make a friendship and if it becomes that, cherish this friendship. Be a listener, show compassion, and give encouragement; be the kind of friend you would wish to have.

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