

# Effectively Caring for Aging Parents

As more Americans live longer, millions of middle-aged adults find themselves caring for their aging parents. It's not an easy task, especially for those with children still living at home.

"Caregiving can be so overwhelming, it's almost impossible," says Donna Cohen, Ph.D., a professor in the department of aging and mental health at the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute at the University of South Florida. "But it can be done if you develop specific skills and tailor them according to your parents' needs and your family's circumstances."



The following is a framework designed to help you provide care more effectively.

## Don't Parent Your Parents

As your parents age and become frail or ill, resist the urge to regard them as children. Instead, think of caregiving as a family business and yourself as an executive with problems to solve.

"Treat your parents as having a legitimate role. This empowers a partnership," Dr. Cohen says. "Your role will be to take control, but it's not with the same authority you use with your children."

For example: Your mother can't see well anymore but insists on driving. Instead of taking away her car keys, sit down with her and begin a dialogue. Say, "Mom, I'm worried about you. Aren't you worried about your driving?"

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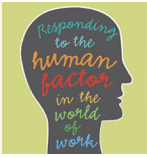
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Claremont EAP distributes this newsletter to provide employees with general behavioral health information. If you have concerns about these or other behavioral health issues, you can call Claremont to arrange for assistance. You will be directed to an appropriate, experienced professional who can offer guidance in a variety of work and family matters.

For confidential help, call: **800-834-3773**

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## Kinds of Care

The kind of care your parents need depends on their level of dependence. This is something you can determine in conjunction with your parents and their health care provider: Do they need to be in a nursing facility? An assisted living arrangement? Can they continue to live on their own, but with some outside help?



A variety of government programs are available for the elderly. You can find more information on them by looking in your local phone book under Aging Services.

## Don't Do It Alone

Because every family is different, there's no one right way of caring for aging parents. "But there are wrong ways, and the worst one is to do it alone," Dr. Cohen says. The demands of caregiving can become so immense that they can affect your health, leading to illness and depression.

"Half of all caregivers get depressed in the course of caregiving," Dr. Cohen says. "In turn, depression takes a toll on their physical health, affecting their job performance and can even lead to the abuse of the parents they're caring for."

To manage caregiving effectively, seek help and advice from professionals and your siblings. For example: Consult a financial planner or attorney regarding your parents' estate, living wills and other

legal matters. Work with physicians to understand your parents' health problems and the treatments they're getting. Talk to a pharmacist to learn the potential side effects of their medications and to make sure those medications are compatible.

Meet with your siblings over breakfast, not at the end of the day when everyone's tired. Describe the problem you're facing and share your feelings about it with them. Let them do the same.

"Besides determining what's workable for your parents, your goal should be to find the best way for everyone to work together," Dr. Cohen says.

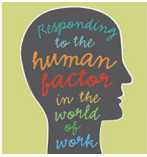
## Stay Optimistic

Unlike caring for children, caring for aging parents, particularly ill ones, involves the reality that their deaths are approaching.

Nonetheless, "let yourself be guided by a tempered optimism," Dr. Cohen says. "Don't let your hope for the future die too fast."

Within limits, there are things you can do now to maximize comfort and improve your parents' quality of life. "You can convey support and show affection by giving your mother a new chenille throw because you know she'll enjoy its softness and warmth," she says. "Even holding someone's hand is a powerful way to ease pain and loneliness."

All told, "caring is more than loving," she says. "It's a series of discreet skills that involve listening to your parents, making decisions about their needs and taking action, if necessary. And it has mutual benefits. Through caring, we can learn more about ourselves."



# Reduce Your Water Footprint: Less Is More!

Just as clean water preserves health, water conservation also protects health, by ensuring that water will be available when it is needed, now and in the future.

While looking out the window on a rainy and blustery day, many people naturally long for a quick return of sunshine. Put simply – we often don't appreciate how important water is in our everyday lives until we either don't have any or we are running dangerously low.

Each year in mid April, the National Environmental Education Foundation sponsors National Environmental Education Week to promote understanding and protection of the natural world with a week of environmental learning and service leading up to Earth Day on April 22. The theme for National Environmental Education Week (April 13-17) in 2009 – “Be Water Wise” – focused on the critical importance of careful use of water in the United States and the world. The theme for Earth Day is “The Green Generation,” a campaign culminating on the 40th anniversary of Earth Day in 2010 that encourages ordinary people to take action to improve their health, improve their schools, and participate in building solutions to urgent global issues such as climate change or the world's water crises.

Many states face critical water shortages due to a combination of increasing supply needs and drought. Most notably, in the Southwest more than 30 million residents from Utah to Northern Mexico now rely on the Colorado River for all their water needs. For the past 5 years a devastating drought has taxed the reservoir system designed and built 70 years ago for a third of the

people it now serves. So serious is the shortage that residents of Las Vegas, Nevada, are being encouraged to replace their green lawns with Southwestern desert xeriscapes to reduce the demands on Lake Mead.

Lake Mead was formed in 1937 when the massive Hoover Dam project bottled up the Colorado River to provide water storage and hydroelectric power for Nevada, Southern California, and Arizona. The demands on that lake to satisfy needs for drinking water, irrigation, and electricity will take more than 2.77 million acre-feet of water in 2009 alone.

In the Southeastern United States, severe drought conditions affect parts of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. In fact, this drought has been so severe in recent years that at one point, the main reservoir for metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia, was down to only a 60-day supply.

The United States is fortunate to have one of the safest public drinking water supplies in the world. In 2000, the United States alone used 408 billion gallons of water per day! This equals approximately 1400 gallons of water per day for every man, woman, and child. That amount is enough to fill 14 standard-size bathtubs and includes both direct water use (drinking, bathing, flushing the toilet, etc.) and indirect water use (watering the lawn, washing the car, growing crops, manufacturing, etc.). The increasing demands of agricultural, industrial, and personal consumption have pushed the management of water onto the center of the public health stage along with water sanitation.

## Be Water Wise

Just as clean water preserves health, water conservation also protects health, by ensuring that water will be available when it is needed, now and in the future. And water conservation is especially effective when practiced at the micro-level - by individuals and families as part of everyday habits. In an average household, simple acts such as taking shorter showers, doing one less load of laundry per week, brushing your teeth with the water turned off, washing your car less often, and reducing the amount of water used for landscaping can save more than 1500 gallons of water per month.

Wise water use is a crucial component of good public health policy. Conserving water in the face of increased scarcity and demand will ensure its continued availability to support good health outcomes.

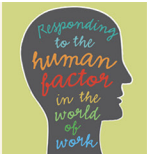
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has dedicated significant resources to the topic of water; visit the newHealthy Water Web site.

This week, designated to increase our awareness of the importance of being water wise, should serve as a springboard to action for each of us. Encourage your family, neighbors, and coworkers to examine their water use patterns and to actively reduce their water footprints.

When it comes to water use, “less is more” is the best way to go. When you use less water, you help ensure there is more water for everyone. It truly is a time to “Be Water Wise.”

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) ©2014

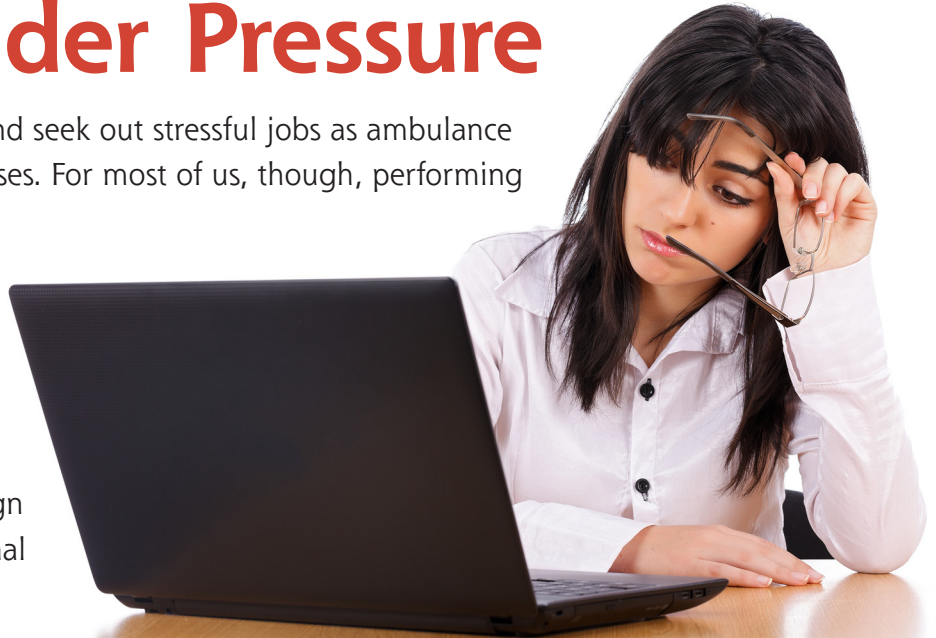
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# Perform Under Pressure

Some people thrive under pressure and seek out stressful jobs as ambulance drivers, firefighters or critical-care nurses. For most of us, though, performing under pressure can be overwhelming.

“Working under pressure can be downright paralyzing, especially if you start the day in a chaotic workpace,” says Patty Kreamer, author of *The Power of Simplicity*. “When you finally hit the breaking point, it’s a sign it’s time to examine your organizational and time-management skills.”



## Levels of workplace pressure

The more you learn about the pressure times and triggers at your workplace, the better you’ll be able to plan for them.

According to Ms. Kreamer, these are the three levels of workplace pressure:

- 1. Sustained pressure.** You have on-the-job pressure all the time. You have more work than you can accomplish in a reasonable amount of time; the work is too mentally taxing or physically strenuous for you; your company is disorganized or you work with difficult people.
- 2. Structured pressure.** Deadlines or work overloads occur at the same time of day, week, month or year.
- 3. Spontaneous pressure.** A pressure situation can pop up at any time. Perhaps other employees don’t show up or you’re often asked to give presentations at the last minute.

Knowing which kind of pressure you’re experiencing can help you cope with it by planning appropriately and prioritizing your work.

## Start with a plan

If you have no plan when you start the day, you’re under pressure the minute you climb out of bed. With a plan, you can wake up knowing what has to be done and when.

This means not only putting a task list on paper, but also prioritizing the tasks and plugging each

one into a time slot in your day planner so you know how your day will shape up.

“You’ll accomplish much more in less time because you have prioritized your tasks,” advises Ms. Kreamer. “It takes only about 10 minutes to plan your day, a small investment with a high return on investment.”

## Unclutter your work area

It’s easier to work under pressure when you have a clear, or at least an uncluttered, space in which to work. If your work area is a constant mini-disaster, schedule time in your day planner to go through your papers.

“Clutter is nothing more than unmade decisions, so rather than continually putting off the time to decide, schedule time to make thoughtful, fast decisions,” says Ms. Kreamer.

## Respond, don’t react

There’s a huge difference between a knee-jerk reaction and a planned response to a critical or annoying remark. Reacting by using sarcasm or an angry tone of voice will only add to your stress.

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Here are some safe responses to negative comments: “That’s interesting.” “I’ll think about it and let you know.” “I need to get back to work.”

## Follow a healthy lifestyle

Your body needs high-quality fuel to function under pressure. Plan your grocery shopping so you have healthy food on hand for breakfast and can take healthy snacks to work.

In addition, allow time during your lunch break for a brisk 20-minute walk. The fresh air and exercise will help clear your mind and recharge your energy.

## Attitude

Your attitude is totally in your control. Make a decision to have a positive one. Planning for positive thoughts will help you be less stressed.

“You not only have to plan for your work, you also have to plan for yourself,” says Ms. Kreamer. “Investing some time up front to get organized can be just the pressure-release valve needed to survive on a daily basis.”

*Krames Staywell*