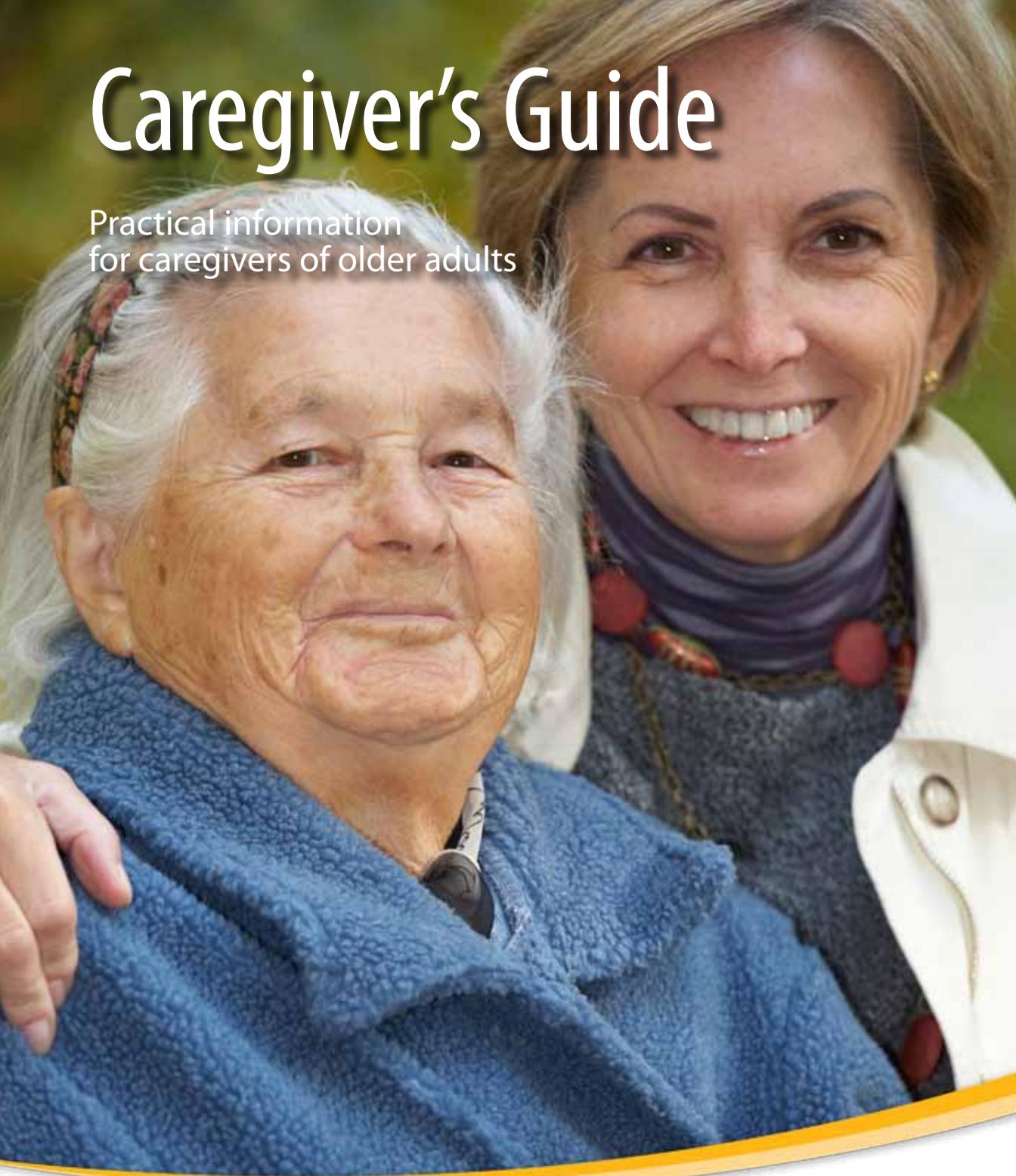


Caregiver's Guide

Practical information
for caregivers of older adults



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The Caregiver's Guide

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Introduction

Today, New Brunswickers are living longer and with fewer health issues than in the past. These improvements are owed to dramatic progress in the detection and treatment of diseases and to the adoption of healthier lifestyles. Even though we are living healthier and longer lives, the majority of seniors continue to be challenged by at least one chronic disease or condition.

Seniors prefer to stay in their familiar surroundings for as long as possible, but eventually, they may need help to do so. In many instances, this can be achieved with enhanced supports from the community, which may in turn help to delay or avoid the need for more costly forms of long-term care services, such as hospitalization or moving to a special care home or nursing home. Family caregivers also play an important role in helping seniors remain at home. There are several ways that we can ensure caregivers are provided with the support they also require.

Some examples of support for caregivers include:

- Providing options for respite services, such as Day Activity Centres for seniors, Friendly Visiting, Telephone Reassurance, Meals on Wheels, and respite beds in special care homes and nursing homes.
- Collaborating with employers to encourage the implementation of more flexible work policies to support family members assisting seniors.
- Assisting families in learning how best to carry out the tasks of caregiving by making information available when needed.

The purpose of this guide is to provide information to individuals who are or anticipate becoming caregivers. It provides advice on various aspects of caregiving as well as practical ways caregivers can adapt their lifestyles and living environments to ensure a better quality of life for themselves and the senior for whom they are caring.

In the midst of their many responsibilities, caregivers can forget to take care of themselves and run the risk of developing health problems and feeling emotionally stressed. This is why we have also included information on self care and building and enlisting the help of a support network.

As programs can change, readers are reminded that this is published as a guide. Specific program details should be obtained directly from the sources listed.

Caregivers

Caregivers are strong and courageous individuals who play an important and invaluable role in our society.

Family caregivers include family members, friends, neighbours and volunteers who provide unpaid care, assistance or emotional support to another person. Many caregivers are also raising children, volunteering or working in paid employment.

Caregivers who are employed

Balancing work and caregiving responsibilities is a challenge. The good news is that employers are increasingly aware of this reality. They realize that the struggle to balance work and family commitments has important implications for employee productivity. As a result, more workplaces are promoting family-friendly organizational policies such as flexible work arrangements, family leave, employee assistance programs and educational opportunities. If you are experiencing difficulties balancing work and caregiving responsibilities, ask your employer what help is available through your workplace.

Taking care of yourself

The caregiver is a very important person in the life of the care receiver. Providing this type of support can be a demanding task, requiring time and energy, and many caregivers suffer health problems as a result of the intense physical and emotional demands of looking after someone. If you want to continue giving support, it is essential that you look after yourself.

Some positive aspects of caregiving include:

- A new relationship with the person for whom you are caring
- A chance to give back
- A sense of purpose, accomplishment and satisfaction
- Development of new skills and knowledge
- Increased compassion
- New friendships through your support network

Caregiving is rewarding, but it is normal to have emotions that challenge your effectiveness as a caregiver. Emotions you may experience include:

- Carrying the burden of the “sandwich generation” – caring for an aging parent while working and raising a family of your own
- Anger over the changing relationship and your new role as caregiver
- Frustration at your inability to meet all of the person’s needs
- Guilt over not doing enough, or not making the best choices
- Grief about the loss of your loved one’s abilities. You may also grieve future plans or the relationship you once had with the individual.

Keep in mind that some people experience a decline in physical and mental abilities as they age and that feeling upset over these changes is a normal reaction. Sometimes the person going through these changes will not accept help and will prefer to assert their options. Listening to them may improve their outlook and your understanding of the situation.

An honest conversation can help relieve tension, resolve problems and ease negative feelings.

The following suggestions can help you cope more effectively with the challenges of caregiving:

- Accept that there are some things you cannot change – focus on the ones you can.
- Help the person in your care cope with his or her feelings – his or her life is changing too.
- Instead of focusing on what the individual can no longer do, choose to focus on what he or she can still do.
- If the individual has a medical condition, learn about it and how you can best care for him or her.
- Familiarize yourself with common behavioural changes. Knowing what to expect can help you to better cope.
- There is a difference between “helping” and “doing” – adopt an approach that promotes the individual’s independence whenever possible.
- If you find yourself becoming impatient, take a break to do something positive for yourself to reduce the tension.

Always make time for yourself, even if it’s just an hour or two.

Take care of your health

- Get adequate rest, good nutrition and sufficient exercise.
- Trust your abilities and talents.
- Be gentle with yourself and others.
- Enjoy a rest and a recharge.
- Let go of grievances and grudges.
- Maintain your hobbies and interests.
- Recognize and respect your limits.
- Caregiving is a job and respite is your earned right – reward yourself with respite breaks often.

- If you are feeling overwhelmed, seek advice from a friend, a caregiver support group, or a health-care professional who can offer insights, comfort and support to help you get through a transition in your life .
- When others offer help, welcome their assistance, even if it is as simple as running an errand for you. Don't be afraid to be specific about what kind of help you need.



Learn to recognize the signs of stress

- Denial
- Anger
- Social withdrawal
- Anxiety / worry
- Exhaustion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Health problems
- Weight gain or loss

Don't wait until you reach your limits to turn to family, friends, health care professionals and the community for support.

More ways to take care of yourself...

- Be realistic about how much you can do.
- Be positive – your attitude affects how you feel and the way you approach your caregiving role.
- Accept your feelings – in a single day, you may feel contented, angry, guilty, happy, sad, embarrassed, afraid and helpless. These feelings may be confusing, but they are normal. Recognize that you are doing your best.
- Take advantage of respite programs, which provide temporary care while you take a break from caregiving duties.

Respite care options

Respite care can be provided by an informal system of family members or friends. It can also be obtained through the services available under Long-Term Care:

- **Day Activity Centres for Seniors** provide caregiver relief, social support, and meaningful social / recreational activities in a group setting. There is normally a small fee to cover the costs of snacks and meals.
- **Home Support Services** can help you with daily activities such as personal care (examples: feeding, grooming, bathing), housekeeping and meal preparation.
- **Relief Care** can be provided to give support to families or caregivers to keep seniors in their homes and delay or prevent placement in residential facilities or hospitals. Temporary relief can be provided in a person's home, a Special Care Home or a Nursing Home.

For more information on how to access these services, contact your regional Office of the Department of Social Development.

Acadian Peninsula	1-866-441-4149
Chaleur	1-866-441-4341
Edmundston	1-866-441-4249
Fredericton	1-866-444-8838
Miramichi	1-866-441-4246
Moncton	1-866-426-5191
Restigouche	1-866-441-4245
Saint John	1-866-441-4340

Try to use respite services regularly so you can become familiar with the respite staff and be confident in the care that is provided. Regular use of respite care will help you relax and enjoy your break knowing you can trust the relief staff or volunteers to provide quality care in your absence.

Recognizing one's need for help is a sign of strength in itself.

Your support network

Learning to accept help is central to self-care for every caregiver. The following are examples of who could be included in your support network:

- Family members – Listen to each other and come to a mutual agreement on plans for the person receiving care. Family members who live far away can also help. For more information on caregiving from a distance, please consult page 10 of this booklet.
- A professional / community team:
 - Trained caregivers are ideal for relief care, even if only for an afternoon or evening.
 - A homecare aide can help with personal care activities such as bathing and dressing.
 - Community groups often provide services that could help you in many ways.
 - Get to know the doctors, nurses, social workers, rehabilitation specialists, and others working with seniors. Professionals are a great source of information on available services
- Caregiver support groups are a good way to share experiences and advice with others who are in a similar situation.

How family, friends and neighbours can help

Family, friends and neighbours are important sources of support for caregivers. If you are part of someone's support network, here are several practical ways you can help the primary caregiver:

- Take time to listen – let the caregiver know that you are there to talk if he or she feels overwhelmed.
- Be specific with your offers to help. Instead of an open-ended offer like "Let me know if you need anything," try a more concrete offer such as "I am going to the store. Would you like me to pick something up for you?"
- Offer to relieve the caregiver – encourage him or her to relax, spend time on a favourite hobby or run some errands.

- Provide a change of scenery – suggest an outing to the park or a visit to your home that could include the person receiving care
- Choose an activity that everyone will enjoy and arrange a suitable time for the visit.
- Keep in touch – a phone call, a card, an e-mail or a visit can mean a lot.
- Learn about the health condition of the person receiving care.
- When visiting, be relaxed and engaged, not rushed.
- Talk about things the person enjoys, or chat about everyday happenings, the weather, children or grandchildren.
- Stay the course – caregiving is often a long journey. Any support you can provide along the way will be appreciated.

What you might not know about caregivers

- They often feel alone and isolated from friends and family.
- They are often reluctant to ask for help, even though they may need assistance.
- They sometimes could use help with errands or household tasks.
- They experience stress that can affect their health.
- They need regular breaks from caregiving.
- They often need someone to listen.

Planning for the future

Planning for the future can reduce stress and worries by ensuring that steps are in place in case of a sudden or unexpected change in the individual's or caregiver's health. In the event that this should happen, all those involved will have the satisfaction of knowing that a system is in place that outlines what needs to be done and who will do it. If the person you are helping is mentally competent, ask what his or her future care wishes are and make sure they are respected.

Practical Advice for Caregivers

- Keep an up-to-date list of contact information of service providers and programs in the care receiver's area. Most jurisdictions have a guide to services and programs for seniors.
- With the consent of the care receiver, arrange for programs and services in the community, such as Meals on Wheels, Telephone Reassurance, Friendly Visiting, Home Support Services, relief care, and Day Activity Centres for seniors.
- Learn all you can about the person's health condition(s).
- Keep the following information about the older adult on hand:
 - Date of birth
 - Social insurance number
 - Medicare Number
 - Health insurance information
 - Up-to-date list of medications
 - Names, addresses and telephone numbers of doctors, hospitals, and clinics involved in his or her medical care

Caregiving from a distance

Caring for someone from a distance can be just as stressful as, or even more stressful than being there. If you are a long-distance caregiver, you may not be on site providing direct care. Instead, you could be busy locating and co-ordinating services, or discussing plans with the person receiving care, health-care providers and family members. You may also be delegating tasks, monitoring the situation and helping to make decisions.

If you are not the primary caregiver, make yourself available to the person who is.



There are a number of ways for a long-distance caregiver to participate in caregiving:

- Keep regular contact with the older person– establish routines for telephone calls, send e-mail messages, photos, or home videos.
- Visit as often as you can to provide relief to the on-site caregiver.
- Offer to help with financial matters, such as contributing to the purchase of a helpful piece of equipment.
- Explore technologies that promote independent living for seniors while offering peace of mind to caregivers who live at a distance that make regular visits impossible. Please see page 25 of this booklet for a brief description of these services.

Personal Care

Personal care is an intimate time and can be perceived as intrusive. If you are assisting someone with personal care needs, it is important to plan plenty of time to allow for all necessary activities while following the person's usual routine as much as possible. The most important part of a personal care routine is ensuring that modesty and privacy are maintained.

Bathing

- Be familiar with the routines and preferences of the person – does he or she prefer a shower, a tub bath or a sponge bath?
- It helps to tell the person ahead of time that he or she is going to bathe.

- Use a calm and gentle manner and proceed slowly. Do one step at a time, talking the person through each one.
- Maintain a feeling of privacy by creating a calming and relaxing ambiance.
- Make sure the bathroom is warm and inviting.
- Collect all the necessities, including towel, soap, washcloth and skin lotion, and place them within easy reach.
- Hand out items in order of use to give the person the opportunity to do what he or she can by himself or herself.
- The ideal water heater setting is 120°F (49°C). You may want to adjust your water heater's settings to prevent burns.
- Never leave the person unattended.

Hair care

- Encourage the person to choose a cut that is attractive but easy to care for.
- Make shampoos part of the regular shower or bath routine.
- If movement is limited, devices such as shampoo boards can make shampooing easier. Check with a beauty salon equipment supplier or go online to obtain one.
- Shampoos that do not require rinsing can be used between shampoos for those with limited mobility or who present challenges with bathing routines.
- A visit to or from a barber or hairdresser makes any day special.

Skin, foot and nail care

Attention to this basic grooming is essential to good health. Neglect can lead to painful sores and in-grown nails that require medical treatment. Foot care, including regular inspections for cracks, cuts or ingrown nails is especially important for people with diabetes.

- Keep finger and toe nails trimmed straight across. If nails are very thick or difficult to trim, consult a professional.
- Use body lotion on dry skin, especially on elbows, knees and soles of the feet.
- Use soaps, antiperspirants and perfumes sparingly and keep hot baths to a minimum as they all dry the skin.
- Prevent pressure sores by making sure that the older person changes positions, sits or lies on a flotation cushion and wears soft fabrics (such as cotton) close to the skin.

Oral hygiene

- Follow a routine and tell the person ahead of time that he or she is going to brush his or her teeth.
- Take a gentle, slow and patient approach, talking the person through each step.
- If the person resists tooth brushing, stop and try again later.
- Depending on the person's level of ability, you may need place your hand over his or hers to guide brushing, or stand behind him or her and brush his or her teeth.
- Use a soft tooth brush and toothpaste.
- Dentures should be rinsed after meals and soaked in water overnight. Keeping dentures in the mouth overnight can promote infections.
- If your loved one's dentures seem uncomfortable, consult a dental professional to find out if they need to be adjusted.
- Make sure that the person gets regular dental check-ups, even if he or she wears complete dentures.
- If you notice any changes in the mouth, such as sores, lumps and swollen gums, have them checked by a dentist.

Clothing and footwear

- Choose attractive, comfortable, functional and washable clothing.
- Make sure the person has the right clothes for the right activities

and extra clothes in case something gets soiled. Consider buying duplicates of favourite outfits.

- Choose garments with a minimum number of buttons, fasteners and zippers and make sure these are all easy to reach.
- Large, flat buttons are easier to manage than small round ones.
- Centre-front fasteners are easier to manage than ones on the side or back.
- Zippers should have pull-tabs that are easy to grip.
- Individuals who sit for long periods or who are confined to wheelchairs are more comfortable in short jackets, capes, shawls and ponchos.
- Choose warm, comfortable shoes with non-slip soles.
- Opt for Velcro fasteners instead of shoe laces.
- Avoid slippers that lack support or are too large – they increase the risk of falls.

Eating well

Good nutrition is important at every age. As we age, our dietary needs change. The key to healthy eating is to plan food choices and meals using Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide. To order a complete and free version of the guide, call **1-866-225-0709** or e-mail publications@hc-sc.gc.ca

A registered dietitian can provide advice that is tailored to a person's nutritional needs. To find a qualified dietitian in your area, visit www.dietitians.ca.

Physical activity

Physical activity helps us remain healthy and maintain our bodily functions. When we don't use a part of our body, we risk losing its functional ability. Remember, exercise should never hurt. Ask a physiotherapist what kind of exercise is best for the person you are caring for. A first step would be to order the Physical Activity Guide for Older Adults. To order a complete and free version of this guide, call **1-888-334-9769** or visit www.paguide.com

Constipation

Many factors can cause constipation. These include a diet high in refined foods and low in fibre, lack of physical activity, and some prescription drugs and over-the-counter medications. Bowel movements can often be regulated by eating well, increasing dietary fibre intake, drinking at least eight glasses of water every day, and engaging in regular exercise. If constipation remains a problem, consult a health care professional. A limited course of laxatives may be prescribed, but over-use can sometimes worsen the situation.

Incontinence

Getting to the bathroom in time can be difficult for those with limited mobility, who are confined to bed, or whose bedrooms or sitting rooms are a distance from the bathroom. Consider the following tips:

- Place a commode (portable toilet) beside the bed.
- Visit the bathroom regularly (perhaps every two hours).
- Place waterproof protective covers on the bed and furniture.
- Place waterproof pads and sheets in layers on the bed, so when you remove one layer there is a dry surface underneath.
- Have plenty of clean, dry underwear available.
- Use protective underwear liners, absorbent pads or disposable underwear.

Medication

Make sure that the doctor and pharmacist know about all the medicines the person under your care is taking – both prescribed and over-the-counter drugs. This is important because some medications may cause problems when used with other medications. Make sure you know what each medication is for, how it should be taken, and what its potential side effects are. For more about safe medication use, order your free brochure of Knowledge Is the Best Medicine by phone at [1-800-363-0203](tel:1-800-363-0203) or e-mail knowledge@canadapharma.org

Sleep

During later life, the need for sleep decreases to about six hours on average, less time is spent in deep sleep, waking during the night is more frequent and there is a tendency to nap during the day.

Many factors may interfere with optimal sleep in older adults. Acute and chronic illness, the side-effects of some medications, mental health conditions, sleep disorders and abrupt, uncontrollable changes in social and personal life may all contribute to the development of sleep difficulties.

A first step in the direction of better sleep is to know what interferes with it. Consider the following:

- A regular sleep schedule and a sufficient amount of sleep every night are especially important for older adults, who may have more difficulty recovering from sleep deprivation.
- Good nutrition and physical activity are associated with good sleep.
- Relaxation techniques can assist with physical and mental relaxation.
- The optimal duration of a nap is 10-20 minutes. Otherwise, time spent napping during the day may take away from total sleep time at night.
- Create an optimum environment for sleep: a quiet and dark room and comfortable ambient temperature.
- Reduce the intake of stimulants such as caffeine, nicotine and alcohol as much as possible.
- Reduce stressful experiences and worries close to bedtime.
- Ask the pharmacist or doctor about the possible side-effects of medications on sleep.

Quality of Life

Focus on what the person can do and respect his or her desire to remain independent.

Even though the older adult for whom you are caring for may have some physical or mental challenges, it is very important to recognize his or her strengths and to provide opportunities to engage in meaningful activities. Consider the following tips to help you choose activities that promote the person's dignity and independence:

- Repeat activities that are successful and enjoyed.
- Choose flexible activities that can be adapted to suit the person's needs.
- Consider the person's former occupation, interests or hobbies.
- Emphasize the process of doing things, not the end result.
- Look for activities that make the person feel valued and productive. The person may prefer to only watch or help at first, and may join in later. Do not insist on participation. Just watching can be enjoyable for some.

Activities that promote quality of life

- Walks or drives
- Listening to music
- Singing favourite songs
- Playing an instrument
- Dancing
- Gardening
- Visiting the park
- Knitting
- A favourite hobby
- Reminiscing
- Going through old photo albums
- Reading
- Playing games (cards, board games, video games such as Wii™)
- Coffee, tea and conversation
- Visiting with young children

- Visiting with a pet
- Surfing the Internet
- Watching movies



Reading is a pleasant and enlightening pastime. Those who are willing to read aloud make it possible for everyone to continue enjoying reading. Consider these tips to make reading more enjoyable

- Good lighting
- Large-print
- Illustrations
- Reading glasses
- Audio books and e-book readers
- A book support (for use in bed and in chairs)

Daily activities

The importance of keeping the person involved in daily activities cannot be overemphasized. Simple but helpful tasks include:

- Setting or clearing the table
- Helping with food preparation
- Drying the dishes
- Dusting
- Watering plants or gardening
- Folding laundry
- Folding grocery bags
- Caring for a pet (brushing or feeding it)

Outings

Change is as good as a rest, and an outing is a pleasure, especially if it is well planned.

- Allow plenty of time to get ready so you don't feel rushed.
- When spending time outside on sunny days, wear sunscreen, sunglasses and a hat.
- At the restaurant, mention any special dietary requirements when you order.
- If you would like to obtain a parking permit for persons having a disability, application forms are available from Service New Brunswick at www.snb.ca or 1-888-762-8600.
- If you are unsure about the accessibility of a building you plan to visit, call ahead.

Spirituality

Many seniors draw comfort and strength from their beliefs, and it is important to support them in their convictions. For example, encourage visits from the local clergy or pastoral care workers if these are important to the person in your care.

For many people, spirituality fosters hope and provides a foundation for the celebration of life. It can also help people find meaning in a difficult situation and achieve a sense of inner peace. Spiritual practices can also provide comfort and reassurance as well as encourage acceptance of our mortality.

Physical Environment of the Older Person

Today's advances in medicine and technology make caring for seniors easier than in the past. Talk to an occupational therapist about what home modifications, tools and devices are appropriate for the person in your care.

A physiotherapist can teach you how to provide physical assistance without risking injury to yourself or to the person in your care. You can prevent back injuries by learning the correct way to help someone roll over in bed, get up from a chair, or move from a wheelchair to a car. Check with your local hospital to find a physiotherapist in your area.

Health Care Equipment

Seniors can borrow standard and specialized health equipment free of charge from the Canadian Red Cross Society through the **Seniors' Rehabilitative Equipment Program**. Available equipment includes hospital beds and mattresses, raised toilet seats, overbed tables, canes, crutches, wheelchairs, walkers, commodes and more. To obtain equipment, a written referral must be completed by a New Brunswick physician, nurse, physiotherapist, or occupational therapist. All equipment is returned to the Canadian Red Cross Society office when it is no longer required. For further information, contact your nearest Canadian Red Cross Society office.

Here is a brief house tour with some suggestions you may also find useful.

Bathroom

- Install sturdy grab bars by the toilet and in the bathtub/shower area. Grab bars should be securely attached to studs in the wall and the space between the wall and the bar should not exceed two inches (5 cm). A space any wider could allow an arm to slip through and cause injury
- Consider installing a raised toilet seat.

- Place non-skid decals or a comfortable suction bath mat on the floor of the tub.
- Place a non-skid mat beside the tub.
- Showering is often easier than taking a bath, especially when you place a bath chair in the tub or shower stall.
- A hand-held showerhead offers greater water control and is especially useful for those who sit in the shower.
- If only a bath will do but getting into the tub poses a challenge, investigate what equipment and home adaptation options are available in your area.

Bedroom

- If access is a problem, convert a downstairs room into a bedroom and bathroom, or install a stair lift if bedrooms are on the second level.
- Hospital beds can be raised to make it easier for you to work with the older person, or lowered to make it easier for him or her to get in and out of bed. They also offer several positioning options and have side rails that can be used for support.
- An adjustable-height, self-standing commode (a portable toilet) is useful in “emergency” situations and at night.
- A “trapeze” (suspended triangular device to be grabbed to assist in sitting up or standing) is useful by the bed, chair or commode.
- An adjustable overbed table can be used to hold drinks, snacks, books and crafts.

Entryways

- Consider installing motion detector lights to light up the path to the main door.
- Ensure there are handrails on both sides of the stairs. These should be sturdy, securely attached and in good condition.
- Replace doorknobs with levers for easier access.
- For easy access to the outdoors, add a gentle access ramp to the patio or balcony door.

Floors

- Avoid deep carpets and scatter rugs; they make walking with a cane or walker or using a wheelchair difficult and dangerous.
- Do not buff floors, as it makes them slippery and the shine can cause confusing reflections.

Furniture

- Arrange furniture for ease of movement when using a cane, walker or wheelchair.
- Make sure furniture is sturdy and steady enough that it won't tip if someone leans on it while sitting or standing.
- Avoid chairs with deep seats.
- Choose synthetic fabrics that can be easily wiped clean.
- Upholstered furniture can be treated with protective spray against spills and stains.
- Place contrasting fabrics on the backs and arms of sofas and chairs to help the visually impaired.
- Consider replacing lamps that have hard to reach switches.

Kitchen

- If necessary, adjust the stove by removing knobs or installing dial guards so it cannot be used without supervision. Many ovens are equipped with a self-locking feature – if yours does not have this feature, a lock can be purchased separately.
- Keep sharp utensils and small electrical appliances out of sight.
- Keep all cleaning products and detergents locked up and out of reach.
- Use safety latches on cupboard doors if necessary.
- Consider an electric, whistling kettle with an automatic shut-off system.

Fall Prevention

- Plan for regular vision and hearing tests.
- Install proper lighting throughout the home.
- Check that stairs are in good condition and are slip resistant. Take the same precautions for outdoor steps.
- Arrange to have leaves, snow and ice removed on a regular basis. Use salt or sand throughout the winter months.
- Choose proper footwear. See “Clothing and Footwear” on page 14.
- Use walking aids and other safety devices for extra safety.
- Make sure that area rugs are non-slip. If needed, secure them with double-sided carpet tape.

You can learn how to react in an emergency situation by taking a First Aid and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) course. For course offerings in New Brunswick, contact

- St. John Ambulance, at [1-800-563-9998](tel:1-800-563-9998) or visit www.sja.ca/newbrunswick/training
- Canadian Red Cross, at [506-674-6200](tel:506-674-6200) or visit www.redcross.ca/atlantic

For more information on adapting your physical environment, order a free copy of The Safe Living Guide, published by the Public Health Agency of Canada, by phone [613-952-7606](tel:613-952-7606), e-mail seniorspubs@phac-aspc.gc.ca or fax [613-957-9938](tel:613-957-9938).

Communication

It can be difficult to spend time with someone when his or her ability to communicate with words is becoming impaired. Some family members or friends may be reluctant to visit because they no longer know how to communicate with the person. However, continued participation in familiar activities and regular contact with family and friends are extremely important, as they provide stimulation and can help maintain independence. Oftentimes, even though a person may have difficulty

communicating, they are still aware of their surroundings and can still sense the emotional state of others. Even sitting quietly together conveys your care and provides comfort.



Conversation

- Listen attentively and try to sense the feelings the person is expressing. You can then respond to the emotional tone of what is being said. For example, "You seem to feel upset."
- Body language is a useful communication tool. Pay attention to pauses, tone and volume of the voice, gestures, posture, and facial expressions.
- Reflect on how you are presenting yourself. Are you tense and frowning, or calm and reassuring?
- Be calm and patient.
- Use gentle touch to help convey your message.
- Maintain a normal, adult conversational structure – do not use "baby talk" or patronizing language.
- Speak slowly and clearly and allow plenty of time for a response.
- Do not communicate with others in front of the person as if he or she weren't there. When others are present, remember to always include the senior in the conversation.

While we're on the topic of communication, don't forget: *A hug says a lot!*

Communication devices

Communication devices, both simple and sophisticated, can simplify daily activities and are essential in emergencies. Consider the following suggestions:

- Install extra telephone jacks or consider a cordless telephone.
- Invest in a push-button telephone with large numbers and memory dial. Some cell phones are also designed with these features.
- Post large-print emergency and back-up caregiver telephone numbers near the telephone.
- Adjust the telephone volume to an appropriate level.
- Attach a carrying case for a cordless or cell phone to a walker or wheelchair.
- Consider an emergency response system for use when the older person is home alone.
- Talk to your local police department if the person you care for might wander away from home. The police can put a plan in place and can react more quickly when they know about the situation.

Independent living through the use of technology

Several technologies exist to help seniors live independently while providing peace of mind to family members. These are ideal for seniors who live alone or are alone for long periods, have a medical condition or are at risk of falling.

Medical alert services allow seniors to call for help at the touch of a button, ensuring that emergency situations are responded to quickly and efficiently. A family member or emergency services are contacted, depending on the person's need.

Monitoring systems use discrete cameras and motion sensors to allow caregivers to monitor a loved one's daily activities from a distance to ensure that they are safe and well.

This service can also provide caregivers with instant notifications on selected areas of concern, such as:

- Wandering
- Forgetting to take medications
- Sleeping and eating habits
- Absence of activity
- Injuries and other health issues

Legal Concerns

Try to settle end-of-life and legal matters ahead of time. Although everyone should plan ahead, the elderly and their caregivers may have particular concerns about what might happen if they lose their ability to make decisions.

Things to consider when planning for the future

- Making a will.
- Making funeral arrangements.
- Creating a power of attorney for financial matters in which a person (the donor) gives another (the donee) the authority to handle his or her financial and property matters. (It needs to be an “enduring” power of attorney for the power to continue if the donor becomes mentally incompetent.)
- Creating a power of attorney for personal care in which the donor gives someone the authority to make his or her personal and health care decisions when he or she is unable to do so.
- Setting up shared ownership in bank accounts and other assets.
- Creating a trust, which is a legal arrangement in which a person gives money or property to another person to hold for him or her or for someone else.
- Creating a life tenancy, which is an interest in real estate that lasts for a person’s life. People can create life tenancies with anyone they trust.

- Making a living will / advance medical directive that sets out in writing a person's wishes for health-care treatment, typically at life's end when they are unable to participate.

Planning ahead can give peace of mind to both the care receiver and the caregiver. Important documents should be kept in a safe place, but one where you can easily access them.

For more information and educational pamphlets on legal topics, contact the **Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick (PLEIS-NB)**. PLEIS-NB is a provincial non-profit organization and a registered charity. Its mandate is to provide the public with information about the law.

PLEIS-NB does not provide individual legal advice, only general information. A broad range of educational booklets are available, many dealing with topics of particular interest to seniors, such as **wills and estate planning, power of attorney, abuse and neglect, going to a nursing home, and investment fraud**. Anyone requiring specific legal advice should consult a lawyer.

Contact information

Tel: **506-453-5369** pleisnb@web.ca www.legal-info-legale.nb.ca

Visiting the Doctor

As caregiver, you may advocate on the care receiver's behalf when visiting the doctor. This role may involve asking questions and taking notes on the doctor's instructions during appointments. Here are a few tips:

- Communicating clearly with the doctor is crucial. Making regular, scheduled visits with enough time to discuss concerns will help you make the most of every appointment. If you have questions following a visit, contact the doctor's office.
- Keep a journal with notes about the health of the older person. Note any symptoms and changes in the person's health and

behaviour. Include medications taken and the time at which they are taken, as well as any reactions. Bring these notes to appointments.

- Keep a list of questions to ask the doctor and be prepared for a follow-up visit if time is limited.
- Seek out more information to address any concerns.



Hospitalization

Should the person in your care require hospitalization, your involvement can facilitate care and treatment. Consider the following:

- A hospital social worker is available to help with questions, support, and counselling.
- Provide as much information as possible to the doctors and nurses who will be providing care to meet the needs of the person.
- Speak to the head nurse to find out the best way to make your comments and/or concerns known.

- Care can be greatly enhanced by the presence of family and/or friends who understand the person's capabilities, strengths and limitations, likes and dislikes, fears and anxieties, and who are capable of advocating on their behalf.

Preparing for the Move to a Long-Term Care Facility

Nursing home services

Overview

Nursing home services are intended for individuals who are medically stable and who require full-time nursing care. Nursing homes are staffed with registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, resident attendants, dietitians, personnel in laundry, kitchen, activation, maintenance and administration.

Eligibility

The Department of Social Development must approve all admissions to nursing homes. A social worker or a health professional will determine a person's eligibility by looking at his or her long-term care and social needs. Going to a nursing home is voluntary – a competent person cannot be forced to go to a nursing home.

Costs

If a person can afford to pay his or her nursing home costs, he or she must do so. If a person feels he or she cannot afford the costs, he or she can apply to the Department of Social Development for a subsidy. A person's ability to pay is assessed based on net income. Assets are not included in the calculation of a person's financial contribution. The maximum amount to be paid by nursing home residents may be adjusted from time to time. Up-to-date information on daily costs and nursing home services can be found at www.gnb.ca/socialdevelopment

The move to a long-term care facility can be made easier for both the person who is moving and the caregiver by preparing ahead.

A difficult decision

Facility placement is a very difficult decision for families. Emotions that may arise for family members include the following:

- **Guilt**, often leading to second thoughts about your decision
- **Relief** that the responsibility of providing care is no longer solely on your shoulders
- **Grief**, often based on a fear of the unknown
- **Loss of control** over decisions about your loved one's daily care
- **Anxiety** about handing over the responsibilities of caregiving to others
- **Concern** about the quality of care provided
- **Worry** that your loved one will have difficulty adapting to his or her new home

While daily care shifts to the long-term care facility, caregiving does not end. Family members will still play an important role by providing emotional support and becoming advocates for the care receiver. Here are a few ways to make the transition to this new role easier:

- getting to know facility staff and the Director of Nursing;
- developing a positive relationship with nursing home staff;
- finding out whether there is a Family Council;
- joining a family caregivers' support group;
- familiarizing yourself with the home's policies.

Adjusting to the new situation

It will take time for both of you to adjust. Keep in mind that there is no "ideal" number of times to visit during this period. For some, the strain of caregiving has been such that they need a rest during the first few weeks after the move. Others will want to visit as often as possible.

Whatever you decide during this period is the right decision for you. Go as often as you want and stay for as long as you feel comfortable. The important thing is to make each visit – no matter the length or the frequency – as full and rewarding as possible for both of you.

Your loved one will also need some time to adjust to their new environment. Be patient as they settle in. For some, this may take weeks or months; for others, it may be less. Do not hesitate to communicate closely with the staff during this adjustment period.

Sometimes, the person adjusts quite well to his or her new surroundings. This may leave you with mixed emotions – while you feel happy that the person is doing so well, you may also feel slightly rejected if he or she seems more content in the facility than at home. These feelings are perfectly natural.

You have not lost your role as caregiver. You are now sharing the responsibility of care with others. An advantage of having outside care is that you can focus your time and energy on providing the person with a sense of love and belonging that no one else can give.



End of Life Care

While providing comfort and dignity is important at all times, it is especially important during end-of-life care. Decisions will need to be made throughout the late stage of life. These decisions may be difficult, and you may feel uncomfortable making them.

Respecting the expressed wishes of the person should guide all end-of-life care decisions. If these wishes have not been communicated, knowing the person's values and beliefs can assist in making a decision that most closely resembles the one that the person would make if he or she were capable of doing so. A guiding principle is to uphold the dignity, privacy and safety of the person.

Some individuals may have an advance medical directive or "living will" to assist family members in carrying out the person's wishes in terms of health care treatment. If plans have not been made, or if there are disagreements among family members, you may want to consider asking a third party – such as a member of the health-care team, counsellor or clergy – to assist you.

Financial assistance

Although many employers offer flexible work arrangements, the responsibilities of caregiving can still disrupt a caregiver's work life. In addition, many caregivers are also paying out-of-pocket expenses to care for their loved one.

As a caregiver, you may be eligible for various forms of assistance from the Government of Canada. Service Canada has prepared a list to help you prepare for this role.

1. Apply for Employment Insurance Compassionate Care Benefits

Employment Insurance (EI) provides **Compassionate Care Benefits** to persons who have to be away from work temporarily to provide care or support to a family member who is gravely ill with a significant risk of death.

You can apply for EI benefits online or in person at a Service Canada Centre. You should apply as soon as you stop working, even if you receive or will receive money when you become unemployed.

Self-employed persons who register for the EI program may also be eligible to receive compassionate care benefits.

2. Claim the Caregiver Amount on your Tax Return

You can claim the **Caregiver amount** tax credit if you lived with a dependent who was one of the following individuals:

- your or your spouse or common-law partner's child or grandchild; or
- your or your spouse or common-law partner's brother, sister, niece, nephew, aunt, uncle, parent, or grandparent who resided in Canada
- other criteria may apply

3. Take Care of Yourself While Taking Care of Others

The *Self-Care for Caregivers Guide* from the Public Health Agency of Canada provides you with information about taking care of yourself in demanding times.

4. Explore Live-in Caregiver Options

The **Live-in Caregiver Program** for employers and caregivers abroad allows professional caregivers to work in Canada. Caregivers are individuals who are qualified to work without supervision in a private household providing care for children, elderly persons or persons with disabilities. Live-in caregivers must live in the private home where they work in Canada.

Application information for the program is available on the Citizenship and Immigration Web site (www.cic.gc.ca).

Conclusion

With the growing emphasis on independent living, family caregivers will continue to play a critical role in helping seniors remain in their homes for as long as possible. In many cases, a little help from family and neighbours is all that is needed for a senior to continue living independently in their community. It can be as simple as providing transportation to and from an appointment, shovelling snow, mowing the lawn, or running an errand.

We hope the information and suggestions in this booklet are useful to you and your family in providing care for a loved one. For a complete listing of services and programs for seniors in New Brunswick, please consult the **Seniors' Guide to Services and Programs** published by the Senior and Healthy Aging Secretariat.

As helpful as it may be, written material is no substitute for an understanding listener, so remember to reach out to family, friends, professionals and support groups for help and guidance. Remember that you are not alone, that you have the right to ask questions and to ask for help.

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Much of the content in this publication was based on:

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