

## Home Caregiving Guide

We understand that taking care of a loved one can be overwhelming. Perhaps you feel alone. You are not. Vanderbilt Home Care has a community of people who are making care decisions for their relatives or friends. We're here to support you.

Our caregiving guide contains resources to help you in your care journey.

### Caregiving Checklist

The most loving gift a person can give to one's family is to put your affairs in order before a disaster or medical emergency. To assist in providing that gift, a list has been compiled of the information and documents you should have prepared:

- Important information such as social security and Medicare numbers, bank account types and the location of banks, insurance provider, policy number(s), beneficiaries on policies and type of insurance (health, life, long-term care, automobile, etc.)
- Associations you belong to including military history, organizations, and all papers associated with your membership
- Power of attorney or health care agent
- Living will or advanced directive. Please tell at least one family member where the will can be located
- All property deeds and titles
- Loan/lien information with servicer information, policies and any health/death provisions
- Instructions for funeral services and burial. If arrangements have been secured, list name and location of funeral home

### Questions You Should Ask When Choosing a Home Care Agency

Each home care agency is different in many ways. Here are some questions to ask as you choose a home care agency.

- What is your philosophy of care/what is your mission statement?
- What type of services do you offer to your patients and their caregivers?
- Do you accept my insurance / How do you bill?
- What do you look for in an employee?
- What happens if I need to reach you outside of normal business hours?
- Why should I choose Vanderbilt Home Care over another agency?

**Home Health Care Star Rating.** The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has a tool called Home Health Compare (HHC) for you to use when choosing a home health care provider. [Use the HHC online tool.](#)

Learn more about Medicare's [Home Health Compare](#) program.

## **A Beginner's Guide to Caregiving**

When you are a new family caregiver, it can be hard to know where to start. Perhaps you've only recently realized that your loved one needs help, and is no longer as independent. Or, maybe a sudden change has taken place in your loved one's health. The sooner you find support, the better.

**Learn the diagnosis.** Knowing your loved one's diagnosis can help you plan ahead realistically. Learn as much as you can about your loved one's condition. Many books, videos and classes or support groups are available to inform you about what you can expect as your loved one's disease progresses, and to provide support you need to cope adequately. If your loved one is showing changes in personality or forgetfulness, take him/her to a neurologist or diagnostic clinic. An evaluation by one of these professionals can rule out any reversible causes of dementia symptoms such as medication reactions, infections, nutritional deficiencies, depression or Alzheimer's and other cognitive disorders.

**Talk with your loved one.** An awareness of your loved one's financial and health care status can relieve anxiety and help you plan for the future. If your loved one is able to complete a durable power of attorney for finances and health care, an elder law attorney can help. If your loved one is unable to execute this process, you will need further legal advice to learn about your options.

**Talk with family and close friends.** Have a family and friends meeting about your loved one and include him or her. List the tasks that need to be completed so they can be divided. Allow everyone to discuss their concerns, as well as how much and what kind of help each person can offer. As a primary caregiver, it is best to focus on accepting what help your family and close friends are offering. You will need plenty of support for the best caregiving.

**Utilize community/digital technology resources.** If you don't have a close network of family or friends available, community and/or technical resources can help and are available. You can find a list of state/local, national, and digital technology resources on this site.

**Find support for yourself.** You may often feel isolated as you take on more responsibility. A caregiver support group is a good place to meet other caregivers and receive the support essential to care for your loved one as you care and support yourself.

## **How to Communicate with Healthcare Professionals**

It is a challenge for many individuals to understand the impact of illness and to cope with the daily stresses of caregiving. Family members must often learn to read the non-verbal cues from the patient to be able to serve as the communication link between the healthcare provider and the patient.

Forming this link can be particularly difficult for caregivers. Family members who are caregivers must learn to be effective advocates for themselves and their loved one(s). One of the most important skills caregivers need is to be able to communicate effectively with the professionals who provide care to their loved ones. In order to do this, caregivers first need to recognize that they are part of a care giving team and that their roles are equally important to the role of the healthcare provider.

### **Listen and Clarify**

Family and friends who provide hands-on care are more likely to be aware of the individual's history, likes, dislikes and their emotional and spiritual needs. In looking at the patient as a whole person, these factors are critical to the healing process.

Active listening lets others know that they are being heard and understood. Everyone appreciates feeling like they are understood. Asking questions to clarify information or repeat to the speaker what you heard them say to ensure that you and the speaker are on the same page. Doctors and other professionals know that patients and caregivers are more likely to implement care plans that are easy to understand with clear expectations.

### **Preparation is Key**

Being prepared is key for caregivers to have successful interactions with the healthcare system. While some situations cannot be anticipated, it is important to keep critical documents, such as insurance cards, power of attorney forms and information about medications organized in a safe and easily-accessible place.

Planning ahead to ask questions at the doctor's office, scheduling time to discuss care plans with doctors and family members and determining the best way to handle an emergency before it happens are all good strategies that can ease caregiver stress and confusion. Reducing stress helps maintain caregiver's health, and that is just as important as caring for a loved one.

## **State and Local Resources**

- [Council on Aging of Middle Tennessee](#)
- [Metropolitan Social Services](#)
- [Tennessee Commission on Aging & Disability Resource Center \(ADRC\)](#)
- [Tennessee Disability Pathfinder](#)
- [Vanderbilt's Geriatric Program Podcast](#)
- [Vanderbilt Patient and Family Centered Care](#)

## **National Resources**

- [Administration on Aging](#)
- [Alzheimer's Association](#)
- [Eldercare Locator](#)
- [Family Caregiver Alliance/National Center on Caregiving](#)
- [National Center on Elder Abuse](#)
- [National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization](#)
- [Next Step in Care](#)
- [Wellspouse Foundation](#)