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**There is NO health
without mental health!**

Taking Care of an Aging Parent

How to Cope

Are you a member of the “sandwich” generation? You are if you are caring for young children as well as one or more aging parents. Today, 44 percent of Americans between the ages of 45 and 55 have both living parents and children under 21 years old. In fact, 22 million Americans are caring for parents or older relatives, according to the AARP. And, nearly two-thirds of primary caregivers are women, a Kaiser Family Foundation study shows. Most of these caregivers are also either working full or part-time.

Taking care of children, performing on the job and keeping up with the household chores are just some of life’s daily stresses. When you also take care of an aging parent or relative, you can feel stretched beyond your limits. Use the tips provided below to help you cope.

- Be organized. Make a list of things that need to be done, and set realistic priorities and goals. Have a backup plan in place.
- Stay healthy. Get enough sleep, eat a healthful diet and exercise regularly. Most people tend to overlook their own health when taking care of others.
- Make a little time to do things you enjoy. Relax with family and friends. Having fun, laughing and focusing on things other than your own problems helps you keep your emotional balance and makes you a much better caregiver.
- Ask for help when you need it. There will be times when you can’t do everything that needs to be done, so call on friends and family members for help with different tasks.
- Use community resources, such as adult day services, meal or shopping services, and caregiver support groups to help lighten your load. Also look to see what programs are offered through your place of worship.
- Feel stressed, angry or depressed? Step away from the situation for a while. Leave the room for a minute or take a walk around the block.
- Do not drink excessively or use drugs to cope with the stress. If the feelings continue, talk to a trusted friend, relative, clergy or health professional. Ask your employer if there is an employee assistance program you can use.
- Talk to your supervisor at work about your caregiving responsibilities, so he or she knows what difficulties you may experience. Offer to make up any work time you take off for caregiving.
- Find out your company’s policy on caregivers. It may offer benefits or services that can help. Take advantage of flextime policies at work. Consider working part time or job sharing.
- Ask your human resources department for information on the Family and Medical Leave Act. This allows up to 12 weeks a year unpaid leave for family caregivers who meet certain requirements.
- Always thank your coworkers, friends and family for their help and consideration. Offer to help them with heavy family responsibilities.