



# *Therapeutic Nutrition Benefits for Caregivers and Mature Workers*

## **Talking to Others About Your Need for Caregiving Support**

If you are providing caregiving help to a loved one or a friend, you are not alone. In the U.S. today, families are the primary providers of long-term care in their own homes and communities.

- For every one person living in a nursing home in the U.S., there are two people with similar levels of disability still living in the community.
- Family members still provide over 80% of all in-home care to the frail elderly.
- The average married couple spends more years caring for elderly, dependent adults than they will children under the age of 18.
- Caring for older family members has become a way of life for millions of Americans. Thus it is not surprising that 1 of every 4 U.S. households is involved in eldercare.

Most family caregivers--an estimated two of every three--also work. Caregiving itself is often a full-time job. Add to this the responsibilities of a full- or part-time job, and it is easy to understand why 29% of employed caregivers report needing help balancing their work and family responsibilities.

Taking care of a loved one is a very personal commitment; it is up to you as to how and when to share with your boss and co-workers what help you need to balance caregiving and work. Some people find it uncomfortable talking about caregiving with their supervisor. However, waiting until there is a scheduling crisis makes it much more difficult to find a solution that works best for everyone.

The unexpected emotional and practical strains of caregiving combined with your job responsibilities can be overwhelming. Your caregiving role is likely already causing you stress and that can impact both your health and your work performance. So be proactive in tackling the challenges and seeking resources and solutions now, before the issues become bigger.

### **Decide to Have a Conversation**

Set up a meeting with your boss as soon as you realize that you are having a hard time managing both your caregiving responsibilities and work. Your boss may already be wondering why you have seemed distracted or tired. Even if you are not sure exactly the kind of help you need, it is a good idea to start talking to your boss about your role as a caregiver. You need the support of your boss and colleagues--they may have to pitch in to help if there is a caregiving crisis. Talking about caregiving with your boss shows that you want to continue to be a productive employee and help support your team.

### **Outline Your Request**

Think about what you may need day to day to cope with caregiving and then develop a specific proposal that explains your requests. It may be difficult to predict exactly what lies ahead, but begin to identify what you need now and what you may need in the future. If you are asking for more flexibility, think about how you could best help your supervisor and coworkers in return. You are not asking for a favor, but rather an arrangement that will benefit both you and your employer. Remember, your boss may not have much experience in working with a caregiving employee and may not really know what you need. You are seeking an arrangement that helps you remain as a healthy and productive employee. Suggest to your employer to hold employee "brown bag lunch" session four times a year, especially for the resources session. They can call ADRC or AAA's "caregiver supervisor" to talk about it.



## Consider How Others May View Your Request

Think about how your boss and co-workers may react. Be specific, identify what changes in your work routine will best help you continue to be a valuable employee and member of the team. Identify what you can do to assure your boss that you will stay productive—do you need to schedule regular check-ins by phone or e-mail? When should you schedule follow-up meetings to discuss your plan, its implementation, and how to keep the conversation going? Think about how you can show appreciation to your co-workers for any support they give. Showing that you are mindful of your proposed plan's impact on both your boss and coworkers increases the likelihood that they will support it.

## Educate Yourself

Today, more businesses are offering information and support services for caregivers — like this therapeutic nutrition for caregivers and mature workers toolkit. Sometimes, employers offer such programs, but caregivers may not use them because they are not aware of them.

So, take the step to educate yourself. Find out the specific services your employer may offer, including employee assistance programs, and workplace flexibility programs like telecommuting. Ask about the Family Medical Leave act that can allow you to take time off to care for parents, other relatives, or yourself if you are ill.

Online resources can offer a wealth of information and sometimes employers can help you find support groups too (both on-line and face-to-face). These resources can also be helpful as you develop your proposal to discuss with your boss. Do not be reluctant to ask for the kind of help you need.

## References

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