



# REGION 9 AREA AGENCY ON AGING CAREGIVER NEWSLETTER

Serving the Counties of: Alcona, Alpena, Arenac, Cheboygan, Crawford, Iosco, Montmorency, Ogemaw, Oscoda, Otsego, Presque Isle and Roscommon



## DISASTER PREPAREDNESS FOR CAREGIVERS

Northern Michigan has experienced some natural disasters over the last few years. Such as severe weather, fires, floods, ice storms, and other emergency situations. It is important for caregivers to have a disaster plan.

Caring for an older adult or a person with a disability during an emergency requires extra planning. This guide helps caregivers prepare, respond, and recover safely.

### 1. Build an Emergency Plan

- Identify likely risks in your area (power outages, winter storms, floods, etc.).
- Create a written plan that includes:
  - Emergency contacts (family, neighbors, providers)
  - Medical providers and pharmacy information
- Evacuation routes and safe locations
- Share the plan with everyone involved in care.

### 2. Prepare a Go-Bag

- Keep an easy-to-carry emergency kit ready with at least 3–7 days of supplies.

### 3. Plan for Medical Needs

- Keep an updated list of diagnoses, medications, allergies, and care instructions.
- Identify backup options for:
  - Power-dependent equipment (generators, battery backups)
  - Transportation (accessible vehicles if needed)
- Notify utility companies if priority restoration is needed for medical equipment.

### 4. Communication Plan

- Designate an out-of-town contact person.
- Ensure all caregivers and family members know how to reach each other.
- Keep a printed contact list in case phones are unavailable.

### 5. Prepare the Home

- Maintain clear exits and accessible pathways.
- Install smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms.
- Keep fire extinguishers accessible.
- Know how to shut off utilities if necessary.

**WHILE ROUGHLY 9 IN 10 AMERICANS BELIEVE IT IS CRUCIAL  
TO BE PREPARED FOR EMERGENCIES, LESS THAN HALF (46%)  
ACTUALLY HAVE A PLAN IN PLACE**



## 6. Know When to Evacuate or Shelter in Place

- Identify accessible shelters ahead of time.
- Plan how to transport mobility devices and medical equipment.
- If sheltering in place, ensure adequate food, water, and supplies.

## 7. Practice the Plan

- Review and update the plan regularly.
- Conduct practice drills so everyone knows what to do.
- Adjust the plan as care needs change.

## 8. After the Disaster

- Check for injuries and seek medical care if needed.
- Contact family and support networks.
- Watch for signs of stress, anxiety, or caregiver burnout.
- Reach out to local resources for assistance.

# ITEMS IN YOUR TO-GO BAG

- Medications and a medication list
- Medical supplies (first aid kit, gloves, oxygen supplies, N95 Masks, etc.)
- Copies of important documents (ID, insurance cards, care plans)
- Non-perishable food and water
- Extra clothing, blankets, and hygiene items
- Flashlight, batteries, a hand crank radio, and phone chargers
- Comfort items (books, photos, sensory tools)
- Caregiver binder
- Keys (extra set of house and car keys)
- Cash



# DOCUMENTS IN YOUR CAREGIVER BINDER

- **Emergency & Key Contacts:** Family members, primary care physicians (PCP), specialists, pharmacy, and insurance contacts.
- **Medical Information:** Comprehensive health history, medication lists (including dosages), medication reaction trackers, allergies, and vaccination records.
- **Legal & Financial Documents:** Power of Attorney (POA), Advanced Directives/DNRs, HIPAA authorizations, wills, insurance policies, and social security.
- **Daily Care Plan & Logs:** Daily routines, dietary requirements, food/activity logs, and behavioral notes.
- **Charts & Monitoring:** Blood pressure logs, glucose tracking, and medication administration records.
- **Copies of Documents (back up in USB Drive):** Identification documents (driver's licenses, passports, Social Security cards, and birth certificates), medical information, financial records, property records, marriage certification and pet identification/vaccination records.

**ONLY 5% OF HOMES REPORT HAVING A FULLY STOCKED EMERGENCY SUPPLY KIT, AND 20% HAVE NONE OF THE RECOMMENDED SUPPLIES. (SAFEHOME.ORG)**





# STARTING THE CONVERSATION: APPROACHES FOR HELPING YOUR LOVED ONES

Caregivers need all the help they can get. One of the most difficult barriers to helping is knowing the best approaches to addressing the issues that need to be addressed. It all comes down to building, or in some cases, rebuilding relationships. Three areas need to be tackled: communication, planning, and family dynamics.

## COMMUNICATION:

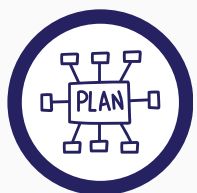


There is the direct approach to communication “You **NEED** to do this,” “You **SHOULD** make out a will or plan your funeral arrangements.” The problem with this approach is that most people don’t want people **TELLING** them what to do. They will be more apt to tune them out and not pursue the thing you are trying to get them to do.

A more effective approach is the indirect one. Don’t be confrontational. Make suggestions that the person look into the subject or point out experiences that others had with the area of concern, and how it worked out (or didn’t) in their case. “Cousin Ned sure was glad that Aunt Mable made out that advanced directive in deciding how to handle Uncle Fred’s stroke.” This will place the idea in the person’s head, and sometimes they will bring it up themselves at a time when they are ready to deal with it.

The most important thing in communication is to keep doing it, communicating. Think of it as an ongoing discussion and not a “We have to get this done and move on.” Most decisions are for something in the future.

## PLANNING:



Timing is everything. Remember the indirect communication approach? Crisis can be avoided by planning for the future. Always remember whom the planning is for. Each of us wants to have the final say in any decision that affects us directly. Your role is to help bring the information to the person so they can make an informed decision. You will also know what’s what by doing this.

Be aware that government benefits have a bias towards institutional care, not the place of choice – home. finances will dictate options at various points in the life journey; income, resources, insurance, benefit programs.

## FAMILY DYNAMICS:



To a parent, you will **ALWAYS** be the child. Look around and see what supports are there. Reach out to siblings, relatives, friends and service providers. The most successful people to deal with caregiving situations are those who build a strong team of support and don’t try to go it alone. This will also allow for all those involved to keep from getting stressed out.

**“MOST PEOPLE DO NOT LISTEN WITH THE  
INTENT TO UNDERSTAND; THEY LISTEN WITH  
THE INTENT TO REPLY.”  
— STEPHEN COVEY**





## TIPS FOR TRAVELING WITH PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA

With Labor Day and holiday season approaching, it is important to remember that travel may look different if you are traveling with someone with dementia.

- Simplify the itinerary. Keep the travel schedule simple and try to avoid multiple stops or overactivity.
- Plan around the person's abilities and routines. Incorporate activities that will bring them joy and take into account what their schedule looks like.
- Stock up before leaving. Bring snacks, water, activities, or other comfort items for the ride, instead of stopping at stores along the way.

If traveling by airplane:

- Know the security procedures and be prepared. The TSA offers assistance with the screening process to air travelers with certain medical conditions. You can call their TSA Helpline to learn more.
- Advise the airline. Let the airline, flight attendants, and others know that you are traveling with someone who has memory impairment and inform them of any safety concerns.
- Find a quiet space. Some airports have designated quiet spaces or rooms that provide more peaceful spaces away from crowds and noise.

If traveling by car:

- Build in break time. Take regular breaks on road trips for bathroom visits, resting, and stretching legs.



## SELF-CARE

Self-Care can play a role in maintaining your mental health and help support your recovery if you have a mental illness. Learn how to get started.



**Physical:**  
Nourishing  
the Body



**Mental:**  
Stimulating  
the Mind



**Emotional:**  
Processing  
and Soothing



**Social:**  
Connecting  
and Giving



**Environmental:**  
Creating Safe,  
Cozy Spaces

**CALL OR TEXT THE 24-HOUR 988 SUICIDE &  
CRISIS LIFELINE  
AT 988 OR 800-273-TALK (800-273-8255).**



# GETTING STARTED WITH CAREGIVING

If you have never been a caregiver before, it may feel daunting at first. There might be tasks to organize, new medical terms to learn, and schedules to coordinate. If you live far away from the person who needs care, you may need to find new ways to stay in touch. This article can help you figure out where to start as a caregiver.

Caregiving can be overwhelming, especially at the beginning. Try to tackle one task at a time. The following offers some ways to get started.



## LEARN ABOUT YOUR LOVED ONE'S NEEDS

Start by understanding:

- Medical conditions.
- Daily routines.
- Medications.
- Mobility or safety concerns.
- Personal preferences and goals.

Keep notes and ask questions during medical appointments.



## BUILD A SUPPORT TEAM

Caregiving is easier with support. Connect with:

- Family and friends.
- Doctors and healthcare providers.
- Community organizations.
- Support groups.
- Local aging and disability resources.

You do not have to do everything alone.



## ORGANIZE IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Create a simple caregiving folder or binder with:

- Emergency contacts.
- Medication lists.
- Appointment schedules.
- Insurance information.
- Legal documents.
- Care instructions.

Being organized reduces stress during emergencies.



## TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF TOO

Caregivers need support and rest to stay healthy. Try to:

- Accept help when offered.
- Take breaks.
- Eat well and sleep regularly.
- Stay connected with others.
- Make time for activities you enjoy.

Caring for yourself helps you provide better care for others.

## A GUIDE TO GETTING STARTED, FINDING SUPPORT, AND TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF →

**Contents include:** Getting started, Finding the care you need at home, Choosing a Long-Term Care Facility, Covering the Cost, Coordinating Medical Care, Planning Ahead, and Caring for Yourself



### The Caregiver's Handbook

A guide to getting started, finding support, and taking care of yourself



## COPING WITH GUILT OVER PLACING SOMEONE IN A NURSING HOME

Guilt and grief are among the most challenging feelings caregivers must face when transitioning from home to a care facility. Every family caregiver wants to do what is right for their family member.

Caregivers face many no-win situations in which someone they care about is going to feel short-changed or hurt by decisions that must be made. Because caregivers are caring people, they are going to feel guilty about it. And that is normal.

But they must keep saying to themselves, with sincerity, “I tried my hardest and did the best I knew how.”

Guilt is often tied to the belief that you “should” be able to care for your loved one until the very end. All caregivers have limits, and there comes a time when professional assistance is best for all involved. Feelings of guilt can also be influenced by your loved one’s seeming improvement after placement, causing you to second-guess your decision. Perhaps you feel guilty because you broke a spoken or unspoken “promise” never to place your loved one in a nursing home. Perhaps you sense that others judge you negatively for this decision, or that your loved one is unhappy in this new environment. It is also common to feel a sense of relief after placement – “now I can finally relax!”

Beware of “should” statements that cause you to second guess yourself. Few caregivers are able to approach moving a loved one lightly. Some guilty feelings are normal and not evidence of failure. Grief is an emotional, physical and/or thought-based reaction to perceived loss and change. We grieve in order to adjust and come to terms with loss that matter in our lives. Many losses occur along the Alzheimer’s journey. Like guilt, grief reactions are normal and to be expected. It is true that the sadness of grief can be overwhelming at times. Placement changes your pattern of living and provides care. An important challenge is learning how to live as yourself, separated from your loved one, yet still very much apart of his or her life.

### WHEN YOU EXPERIENCE FEELINGS OF GUILT, REMEMBER TO:

- Acknowledge your feelings.
- Accept your limitations.
- Allow yourself time.
- Focus on the positives.
- Be gentle with yourself.

**OVER 50 PERCENT OF CAREGIVERS FELT AT LEAST “SOMEWHAT GUILTY” ABOUT NURSING HOME PLACEMENT; OVER 13 PERCENT FELT “EXTREMELY GUILTY.” - AARP**



- Remember, it may be no longer safe for your care recipient to live alone.
- Affording to hire round-the-clock care can be expensive.
- For family members with severe dementia and/or physical disabilities who can no longer care for their own basic needs, however, it is still a necessity to find them 24/7 hands-on care.
- Those with marked cognitive or balance issues are probably better off in a nursing home with experienced staff and built-in barrier-free hallways, well-placed grab bars and other environmental supports rather than in their multistory, cluttered houses. In short, nursing homes offer older adults and caregivers better odds.
- Too many older adults spend their last years alone in their apartments watching TV most of the day. Even if their family caregivers live with them or frequently visit, those older adults are usually socially isolated, a significant risk factor for developing physical and/or mental health problems. Facilities offer greater opportunity for group activities, communal meals and other ways of rubbing elbows with others. Increased social stimulation has clear salutary effects.
- Caregivers resources, such as money, time and energy, are limited. Helping an older adult remain in their home and not go to a facility when they need intensive care often requires diverting some resources away from other family members and their needs, as well as the caregiver's needs.



## DEPRESSION AND OLDER ADULTS

Depression is a common problem among older adults, but it is not a normal part of aging. It can affect the way you feel, act, and think.

Depression is more than just feeling sad or blue. It's a serious mood disorder that affects many older adults and requires treatment.



Depression can be treated.



Signs & symptoms of depression vary.



Friends & family can help offer support.



Living a healthy lifestyle can help reduce feelings of depression.



## AVOIDING DRUG INTERACTIONS

Drug interactions are often a concern for people since as they age, they tend to take even more medications. Pharmacists are trained in medication and specialize in learning about interactions. It is best to check with both your doctor and your pharmacist about your medications.

- More than 34 percent of seniors take medications prescribed by more than one physician.
- 72 percent take medications that were prescribed more than six months ago. This is one reason why caregivers need to be aware of the potential for drug interactions.

Data Found: National Institutes of Health



# AI AND CAREGIVING: DO'S, DON'TS, AND RISKS

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools are becoming more common in caregiving. They can help caregivers stay organized, find information, reduce stress, and improve communication. However, AI should support caregiving, not replace human judgment, compassion, or professional medical advice.

## WHAT AI CAN HELP WITH:

- Organizing schedules, medications, and appointments.
- Creating meal plans, activity ideas, and reminders.
- Translating information into simpler language.
- Helping draft emails, care notes, or questions for doctors.
- Providing caregiver education and resource suggestions.
- Offering companionship tools such as reminders or conversation prompts.

### DO'S:

- **Use AI as a Support Tool**
  - Think of AI as a helpful assistant, not the decision-maker.
- **Double-Check Information**
  - Verify medical, legal, or financial information with trusted professionals or reliable sources.
- **Protect Privacy**
  - Avoid entering sensitive personal information such as:
    - Social Security numbers
    - Insurance information
    - Medical record numbers
    - Banking details
- **Use Trusted Platforms**
  - Choose reputable AI tools with clear privacy policies.
- **Combine AI with Human Connection**
  - Technology should enhance caregiving, not replace family interaction, socialization, or professional care.
- **Ask Professionals When Unsure**
  - Doctors, pharmacists, social workers, and attorneys should still guide important decisions.

### DONT'S:

- **Use AI for Emergencies**
  - AI cannot replace 911, emergency responders, or urgent medical care.
- **Rely on AI for Diagnoses**
  - AI may provide incorrect or outdated health information.
- **Assume AI Is Always Accurate**
  - AI can make mistakes, misunderstand questions, or provide biased responses.
- **Share Confidential Information**
  - Once information is entered online, privacy risks increase.
- **Let AI Replace Human Judgment**
  - Caregiving decisions require empathy, observation, and personal understanding.
- **Ignore Digital Scams**
  - Some scams use fake AI voices, messages, or images to trick caregivers and older adults.

## RISKS OF USING AI IN CAREGIVING:

- ⚠ Overdependence on Technology
- ⚠ Privacy & Security Risks
- ⚠ Incorrect Information
- ⚠ Bias & Discrimination
- ⚠ Emotional Concerns
- ⚠ Scams & Fraud



## IMPORTANT DATES

### ELDER ABUSE, NEGLECT, AND EXPLOITATION CONFERENCE

September 10, 2026  
Divine Shepherd in Standish  
9:30 A.M. - 1:00 P.M.

### THE AGING BRAIN: WHAT'S NORMAL VS. WARNING SIGNS EDUCATIONAL SESSION

September 11, 2026  
Alpena County Library  
9:45 A.M. - 2:00 p.m.

### DEMENTIA WEBINAR SERIES

November 5, 2026: You Are Not Alone  
November 12, 2026: Caregiving During  
The Holidays  
November 19, 2026: The Three  
Golden Rules  
via Zoom  
1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.

### HEALTHY LIVING WEBINAR SERIES

February 4, 2027: Brain Health &  
Memory  
February 11, 2027: Making Your Home  
Work For You  
February 18, 2027: Protect Yourself  
Against Fraud & Scams  
via Zoom  
1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE  
HELPFUL INFORMATION?



### HEARING LOSS

There are multiple illnesses that can cause hearing loss. These include measles, mumps, meningitis, and encephalitis as well as Lyme disease.

Exposure to loud noises can damage your hearing. Noise-induced hearing loss may not be noticeable at first, but it can get worse over time, particularly as you get older. Speech and music may begin to sound muffled or unclear, making it difficult for you to interpret sounds.



### IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Physical activity is critical for caregivers to prevent burnout, manage stress, and maintain the stamina needed to assist others.

Regular exercise reduces psychological strain, lowers the risk of chronic conditions, and improves both mood and sleep quality, allowing you to provide safer, more compassionate care.

### ACTIONABLE TIPS FOR BUSY SCHEDULES:

- **"Mini-Workouts":** Break your exercise into three 10-minute sessions throughout the day rather than trying to find 30 consecutive minutes.
- **Move During Commercials:** Use TV commercial breaks to stretch, walk in place, or do simple bodyweight exercises.
- **Include the Care Recipient:** If possible, participate in safe seated exercises or gentle walks together to benefit both of you.
- **Seek Respite:** Utilize local programs such as Adult Day Centers or ask family members to cover caregiving tasks so you have dedicated time for yourself.

Region 9 Area Agency on Aging Special Projects Coordinator is available weekdays, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. to answer your questions, register you for caregiver workshops, provide resources, and to support you and the person you are caring for.

Contact 989.358.4667 or [healthyaging@nemcsa.org](mailto:healthyaging@nemcsa.org)