

Caring for the elderly

Resources for taking care of aging parents



There are many options available today to help your parents grow old gracefully.

Many adults are finding that their aging parents are in need of healthcare assistance. Luckily, there are many options available today to help your parents grow old gracefully, either in their own home or in a facility, and several ways that you can help finance the costs of the care.

Assisted living. If your parents are healthy seniors who can look after themselves, they generally are eligible to enter a continuing-care retirement community that allows them to buy or rent an apartment and ensures them lifetime nursing care when it is necessary. Another option for healthy seniors is private long-term care insurance, which can help cover nursing home costs or the cost of an in-home aide.

Living with family. Many families opt for moving an aging parent into their own home. If you are able to coexist peacefully with your parent, this may be a good idea because the arrangement frees you from worry about the upkeep of a second home. For parents with dementia or more serious health issues, adult day care is also an option and a good way to get your parent to socialize with other adults.

Living alone. When living together is not a workable plan, maintaining your parent in his or her own home is also an option. There are, however, several fairly expensive items that may be required to make a home environment safe and suitable for an aging person. Various safety features may be necessary, including first-floor bathrooms, grab bars in hallways and bathrooms, and a personal emergency response system in case your parent needs assistance while alone. If your parent is in need of daily assistance with meals or chores, he or she can apply for several services, such as Meals on Wheels, which may be free for anyone over 60. If your parent needs more personal assistance, you may want to look into hiring an in-home aide at a skill level appropriate for the amount of help needed.

Nursing home. If sending your parent to a nursing home is inevitable, make sure you research each home extensively. Reservations at the home selected should be made at least a year ahead of the time that you expect your parent will need it, as waiting lists are typically long at well-respected facilities. Keep in mind, too, that the government offers limited financial help for those families paying for nursing home care.

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Online support for eldercare

The federal government's Administration on Aging offers a variety of print and online materials for elders, their families and professionals regarding housing, medical, caregiving and services for seniors.

ElderWeb has a rich collection of resources for the elderly and their caregivers on financial matters, healthcare, living arrangements, and social, mental and legal issues.

There are other online support services, publications, and resources available that may meet your needs. Check your local library or senior services agency for information.

Financing long-term care

One of the biggest worries of those caring for an aging parent is how to pay for the care needed.

Medicare. Medicare will only pay the full cost of professional help if a physician certifies that your parent requires nursing care and if these services are provided

by a Medicare-certified home healthcare agency. Medicare will only pay for nursing home care on a short-term basis, and benefits are restricted to low-income individuals with very limited assets.

Tax considerations. You may be able to claim a federal tax credit that will enable you to take up to \$3,000 off the cost of in-home care or day care. Another option is a Flexible Spending Account (FSA), which lets you pay for a certain amount of care each year with pre-tax dollars. With eldercare costs continually on the rise, financial planning has become ever more crucial to the economic well-being of adult children responsible for the care of their elderly parents. Don't wait until the last minute—start planning now to ensure the future care of your parents.

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