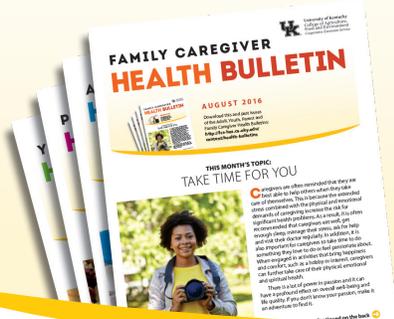


FAMILY CAREGIVER HEALTH BULLETIN



APRIL 2020

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: MILLENNIAL CAREGIVERS



Millennials, those born between 1982 and 2004, are a diverse generation. According to AARP, more than 10 million millennials, ranging in age from their 20s to 30s, serve as caregivers. This generation currently makes up 25% of unpaid caregivers in the United States (Jenkins, 2018).

As a result, researchers have investigated ways in which millennials serve and are affected by caregiving at such a young age.

The face of millennial caregivers

The AARP study, Millennials: The Emerging Generation of Family Caregivers, reported that:

- 73% of millennial caregivers work while also spending 21 hours per week on caregiving tasks.
- Millennials keep more to themselves than older caregivers.
- Less than half of millennial caregivers talk to their bosses about their situation.

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Family and friends can share kind words, provide encouragement, or even volunteer an hour or two of time to provide respite.

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- 54% report that their work or career has been negatively affected by caregiving responsibilities.
- Millennials balance the financial pressure of repaying student debt and spending income on caregiving.
- Millennials spend their own money for care-related tasks including transportation, home modification, food, and medication.
- Millennials are almost twice as likely as older caregivers to provide support for people with emotional or mental health issues.

The challenges of millennial caregivers

Young caregivers are not often recognized in the media, yet they are a growing population and face unique challenges. The online caregiving magazine, The Caregiver Space, highlights the following difficulties.

- **Delaying the future.** Demanding caregiving duties may influence or even delay major milestones, including starting a career, choosing a romantic partner, marriage, and having children.
- **Coping with academic pressure.** The pressure and intensity of balancing caregiving responsibilities with school work can be overwhelming. It can make it hard to concentrate and, in severe cases, cause young caregivers to drop out. It is not uncommon for caregiving to disrupt study or homework time. Emergencies or medical appointments can also cause missed assignments, exams, and tardy projects. Phones always have to be on in case of a call.
- **Spending less time with friends or social isolation.** Meaningful social connections are important for overall health and well-being, yet young caregivers often sacrifice time with friends and other social activities. As a result, young caregivers are at greater risk of becoming socially isolated.
- **Creating a new normal.** It is not uncommon to associate a carefree attitude with youth. But a young caregiver quickly learns how caregiving can accelerate growing up and the need to balance two worlds. Caregiving can include learning about disease and illnesses, taking care of physical and

emotional demands, making meals, cleaning homes, driving to and from appointments, tending to emergencies, managing finances and other legal issues, and serving as patient advocates and powers of attorney. There are often no classes or guidance to help prepare for the role.

- **Managing self-care.** Caregiving is physically and emotionally exhausting — even for young people. Yet, like many caregivers, it can be a challenge to take 10 minutes for “me time.” Such time away from life’s demands can cause anxiety and stress. Taking time can also create guilt. As a result, self-care amongst young caregivers is rare, and many feel that they cannot take the time.

Helping millennial caregivers

It is important to encourage millennials to talk about their situations. Encourage them to talk to school counselors or other mental health professionals. If young caregivers are more honest with themselves, they will likely be more willing to share their reality with others so that families, friends, teachers, and supervisors can support and help them. Family and friends can share kind words, provide encouragement, offer understanding, or even volunteer an hour or two of time to provide respite. It is also important to recognize a young person’s right to be young and to do what young people need or want to do.

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Written by: Amy F. Kostelic, Ph.D.
Edited by: Alyssa Simms
Designed by: Rusty Manseau
Stock images: 123RF.com

