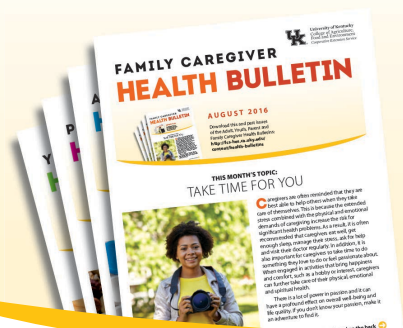




University of Kentucky
College of Agriculture,
Food and Environment
Cooperative Extension Service

FAMILY CAREGIVER HEALTH BULLETIN



OCTOBER 2016

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

CAREGIVING AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS



Despite being pulled in many directions, it is also important to preserve your relationship because caregiving can increase the risk of strain.

Dr. Barry J. Jacobs, clinical psychologist, family therapist and member of the AARP Caregiving Advisory Panel, wrote an article in 2014 for AARP that highlighted a story in which his eyes were opened after his wife was apprehensive about his suggestion to invite his mother, to whom they were providing care, to join them for a movie. While patient and helpful making dinner and driving her mother-in-law to appointments and to run errands, the wife finally felt, at least on this one night, that there was a crowd and that she and her husband needed some time alone as a couple.

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Honesty is the best policy to ensure that everyone's voice is heard and people are more forgiving of limitations.

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The Mayo Clinic stresses the importance of carefully understanding the impact that caregiving can have on a marriage. According to Mayo, caregiving affects relationships because of the stress it can add to couple and family time, routines and finances. Caregiving can cause resentment toward your loved one who demands your partner's time and energy. It can create tension between your partner and other family members involved in the care and cause more things to which you and your partner may disagree.

In the case of Dr. Jacob, he and his wife were honest with each other and they were able to remind themselves that their mother did not expect or even want her adult children to be her social or charity directors. As a result, even the mother made it clear that she understood that couples have busy lives and needs of their own.

To help preserve your relationship while caring for a loved one, Dr. Jacobs and the Mayo Clinic suggest:

- **Don't spread yourself too thin.** Lower your expectations. You cannot be everything to everybody, therefore you need to balance your time, effort, energy, love and responsibilities so that you don't short change yourself or others. You might not be perfect at times, but learn that this is okay sometimes.
- **Don't feel guilty.** Remind yourself that you are not neglecting your loved one when you put your needs or your partner's needs first. On the flip side, don't feel guilty around your spouse and make assumptions that you are disappointing them. Instead, be honest and open with all.
- **Communicate and compromise.** Honesty is the best policy to ensure that everyone's voice is heard and people are more forgiving of limitations. Talk about caregiver roles, your relationship and how you can support and be present for each other.

- **Work as a support team.** Healthy relationships are strong for a reason — because you and your partner are teammates. Even in the shadows of caregiving, you cannot neglect or ignore this very important teammate who is also your future.
- **Prioritize.** Sometimes it can be helpful to triage care recipient's less urgent needs so that you can focus on your partner.
- **Spend time together.** Preserving a relationship means that you have to look for ways to enjoy your relationship. Therefore, it is important to make or even schedule quality time for each other and to celebrate both the big and small things that make you laugh, smile and appreciate each other.
- **Ask for or say yes to help.** Accepting assistance — whether it comes from family, friends or professionals, helps preserve relationships. It allows you time to do things as a couple, including something as simple as running errands or as elaborate as a getaway if someone is able to stay with or invite your loved one to their house.

For more information on how to look after yourself and your family while balancing the role of caregiver, contact your local Extension office or read Barry Jacobs' book, *The Emotional Survival Guide for Caregivers: Looking After Yourself and Your Family While Helping an Aging Parent* (2006).

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