



Actor Portrayals

# Caregiver support

| A guidebook for those caring for a loved one



“There are only 4 kinds of people in this world: those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers. **Caregiving is universal.**”

Rosalynn Carter,  
Former First Lady of the United States

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## What is a caregiver?

A caregiver tends to a person who needs help due to an illness, injury, or disability. There are **professional caregivers**, such as home health aides, and **family caregivers**, who care for a member of their own family, a close friend, or a neighbor.

This booklet is intended for family caregivers and offers information on areas of **daily caregiving, such as managing and administering medications, healthy eating, and being active.** It also offers resources for caregivers and ideas on **how to find support.**

# What do caregivers do?

Caregivers play a vital role in the life of the person they care for. They can help with many aspects of support, such as:

- Transportation for medical appointments
- Purchasing or organizing medications
- Monitoring their medical condition
- Communicating with health care professionals
- Advocating on their behalf with providers or agencies
- Getting in and out of beds or chairs
- Getting dressed
- Bathing or showering
- Grocery or other shopping
- Housework
- Preparing meals
- Managing finances



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In 2024, more than **1 in 4 Americans** over 50 were caregivers to another adult with a health problem or disability.

## Get and give health information during doctor's visits

The person in your care may need to have regular doctor's visits. Here are some tips to help you provide and receive important health information during appointments.

### Before the appointment:

- Write down any questions you may have about your loved one's medicines, tests or procedures they may need, or any other part of their daily care
- Write down any changes you may have noticed in their health and any new or different medicines they are taking



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➤ Always talk to the health care provider before making any changes in the person's care plan.

Use this area to write down your questions:

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## What to know about medicines

If the person in your care takes medicines for a health condition, try to learn as much as you can about those medicines. This will help you give the best care to your loved one.

### Here are some questions you can ask the doctor or pharmacist:

- What are some possible side effects of this medicine?
- How should the person take this medicine? Should it be taken with food or at a certain time of day?
- What other medicines are not good to take with this medicine?
- What vitamins, supplements, or foods are not good to take with this medicine?

## Use a medicine tracker

A medicine tracker is a log you can use to keep track of your loved one's medicines.

- You can use a physical medicine tracker, or a phone app.
- Record all medicines and mark them off as the person takes them each day.
- Go over the medicine tracker with the doctor at each visit.

You can use the medicine log on pages 17 and 18 to keep track of your loved one's medicines.

# Nutrition

## Make a meal plan to help with healthy eating

Eating healthy foods has many health benefits. If the person in your care needs to follow a special diet due to a health condition, or if you like to plan meals to save time, a meal plan is a great tool.

A meal plan is a guide that tells how much and what kinds of food to eat at meals and snack time. It is designed just for the person in your care with the help of a doctor or dietitian (a health care professional who has special training in diet and nutrition).

### The right meal plan may help manage:

- Blood sugar
- High cholesterol
- Blood pressure
- Weight

**A healthy meal plan will look different for everyone, depending on a person's age, weight, health conditions, and foods they like to eat. Here are some questions to ask the doctor or dietitian to get started with a meal plan:**

- What kinds of foods should the person in my care eat every day?
- What serving sizes should they eat?
- Which food groups should we choose?
- How many servings should they have from each food group?

## Getting started

### Meal planning depends on the person's:

- Calorie and nutrition needs
- Lifestyle and eating habits
- Preference of foods he or she likes to eat

### Examples of food groups are:

- Fruits
- Non-starchy vegetables, such as broccoli or leafy greens
- Proteins, such as meat or fish
- Grains or starches, such as bread, rice, or potatoes
- Dairy, such as milk or yogurt



Ask the health care provider about a food plan that is right for the person in your care.

## How to control portions at home

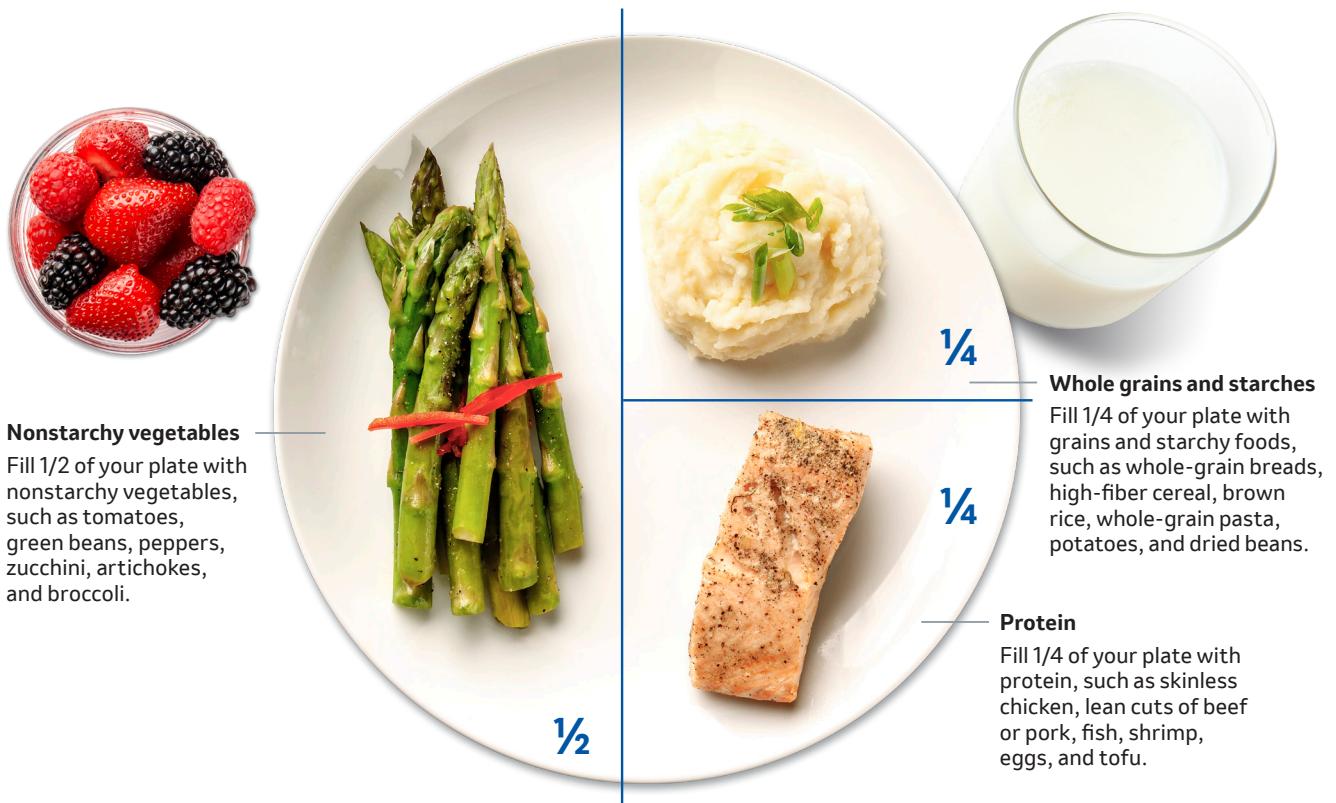
If you're just starting on a meal plan, measuring the right amount of food into portions can be helpful. This is called portion control. You don't need to measure and count everything the person in your care eats for the rest of his or her life. Just do it long enough for you both to learn the right portions to eat.

### Here are some tips to help with portion control:

- Have the person eat meals at the same time every day. Encourage him or her to not skip meals.
- Put the right portion size on the plate instead of eating from the bag, box, or cooking pot.

One way to get started is by using a **9-inch plate** and dividing it into portion sizes.

This example shows the recommended portion sizes for 3 food groups during a meal.



# Encourage being active

## Being an active partner

You can help the person in your care be more active. Start by telling them about how movement and exercise can help their health and well-being.


### Being active can:

- Lower blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol
- Relieve stress
- Lower the chance of heart disease and stroke
- Improve balance to prevent falls
- Increase strength
- Help keep joints flexible
- Help a person lose or maintain weight









Talk to members of the health care team, family, and friends to take small steps to improve the activity level of the person you are caring for and plan for more activity.

# Tips for providing transportation

The person in your care may need your help with transportation.

**Consider these tips to help meet their transportation needs:**

- Ask others to help share the responsibility. Take turns driving the person you are caring for to appointments.
- Call a local taxi service or consider using public transportation. Many public transportation systems have special transit services and can accommodate people with limited mobility.
- Talk about your scheduling and transportation needs with the doctor and health care team. They may offer ride-sharing services.

Ask the health care provider of the person in your care if they offer ride-sharing services.

**Transportation information:**

**Taxi:**

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**Others who can drive the person (name and phone number):**

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**Bus or train used most often:**

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# 5 steps to being the best caregiver you can be

If you are new to being a caregiver, consider taking these steps:

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- 1 Educate yourself.** Learn everything you can about your loved one's health condition and situation. Attend health education classes and doctor's appointments with your loved one.

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- 2 Join your loved one in making healthy life changes.** Set small goals and meet them together, such as taking a walk after dinner or trying a new healthy recipe.

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- 3 Be patient.** Allow your loved one time to process what can be an overwhelming amount of information, and be patient as you both adjust to a new situation.

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- 4 Communicate your support.** Ask your loved one how you can be helpful, and be specific about what you can help with. Let your loved one know you are there to help when they're ready.

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- 5 Take care of yourself.** Recognize your limitations. It's harder to be helpful if you are exhausted or stressed out. If you find that being a caregiver is affecting your health or mental well-being, talk to your doctor about ways you can get help, or look for support groups.

➤ **Take care of yourself, so you can help the person in your care.**  
Talk to your health care provider about ways you can stay healthy. Then you can be there for the person you are taking care of.



# How to cope with stress as a caregiver

## Consider these tips to help you cope with the stress of being a caregiver:

- Find a support group. Talking to others who are in the same situation can be a good way to cope with stress.
- Social connections are important to your well-being. Meet with a friend to go for a walk or do an activity you both enjoy.
- Take care of your health:
  - Try to get enough sleep. Aim for an average of 8 hours a night.
  - Eat a healthy diet.
  - Being active helps relieve stress. Try the tips on page 11 to add movement to your day.

| Resources  |  |
|--|--|
| AARP   | <a href="http://aarp.org">aarp.org</a>                       |
| Aunt Bertha - Connecting People and Programs   | <a href="http://supportnearme.com">supportnearme.com</a>     |
| Caregiver Action Network   | <a href="http://caregiveraction.org">caregiveraction.org</a> |
| Eldercare Locator  | <a href="http://eldercare.acl.gov">eldercare.acl.gov</a>     |
| Family Caregiver Alliance  | <a href="http://caregiver.org">caregiver.org</a>             |
| Long-Term Care   | <a href="http://longtermcare.gov">longtermcare.gov</a>       |
| National Alliance for Caregiving   | <a href="http://caregiving.org">caregiving.org</a>           |
| Medicine assistance websites   |  |
| Partnership for Prescription Assistance  | <a href="http://pparx.org">pparx.org</a>                     |
| RX Assist—Patient Assistance Program Center  | <a href="http://rxassist.org">rxassist.org</a>               |
| 211 Helpline Center  |  |
| <p><b>Dialing 211</b> gives callers information and referrals to local social services. Available in all 50 US states and Puerto Rico.</p>   |  |
| <p><b>The 211 website:</b> <a href="https://www.211.org/">https://www.211.org/</a> and <a href="http://www.211pr.org/">http://www.211pr.org/</a> provides information by zip code and is accessible in 180 languages. Available in all 50 US states and Puerto Rico.</p> |  |

# Medicine log

Write down the names of any prescription and over-the-counter medicines (such as aspirin or cough syrup) that your loved one is taking and the reason for taking it.

| Medicine     | Dosage amount                       | How and when to take it                         | Reason for taking it                                       | Prescribing doctor | Pharmacy    |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|---|--|--------------------|-------------|
| Name         | Number of pills, capsules, or drops | How to take medicine and the time(s) to take it | Reason for taking it. If stopped, give reason for stopping | Name, phone        | Name, phone |
| Description  |                                     |   |  |                    |             |
| Rx #         |                                     |   |  |                    |             |
| # of Refills |                                     |   |  |                    |             |
| Name         | Number of pills, capsules, or drops | How to take medicine and the time(s) to take it | Reason for taking it. If stopped, give reason for stopping | Name, phone        | Name, phone |
| Description  |                                     |   |  |                    |             |
| Rx #         |                                     |   |  |                    |             |
| # of Refills |                                     |   |  |                    |             |
| Name         | Number of pills, capsules, or drops | How to take medicine and the time(s) to take it | Reason for taking it. If stopped, give reason for stopping | Name, phone        | Name, phone |
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| Description  |                                     |   |  |                    |             |
| Rx #         |                                     |   |  |                    |             |
| # of Refills |                                     |   |  |                    |             |

# Important contact information

Use this page to keep important information for the person in your care.

| Health care team      | Name | Phone number | Email |
|-----------------------|------|--------------|-------|
| Primary care provider |      |              |       |
| Pharmacist            |      |              |       |
| Hospital              |      |              |       |
| Lab facility          |      |              |       |
| Nurse                 |      |              |       |
| Specialist            |      |              |       |
| Specialist            |      |              |       |
| Specialist            |      |              |       |
| Specialist            |      |              |       |
| Specialist            |      |              |       |
| Social worker         |      |              |       |
| Back-up caregiver     |      |              |       |

