



It's National Family Caregivers Month

Aetna Supports and Empowers Caregivers

By Randall Krakauer, MD, Head of Aetna's Medicare Medical Management

November is National Family Caregivers Month, a time to recognize those who care for people enduring life-threatening illnesses. The observance provides an opportunity to honor caregivers and spread awareness of resources and support that are available for caregivers.

This month also marks National Palliative Care/Hospice Month. Since 2004, Aetna's Compassionate CareSM Program has supported patients and their family caregivers at the end of life. The program provides nurse case managers to focus directly on the needs of patients, their families and caregivers in a culturally sensitive manner. Specially-trained nurses help coordinate the variety of health care services that may be involved, and link families to community support services. They also serve as a vital source of information and emotional support.



Randall Krakauer, MD

Website offers Caregivers Helpful Information, Tools and Tips

Aetna has created a website that can help people understand the issues, choices and terms related to advanced illness. The [Aetna Compassionate Care website \(www.aetnacompassionatecare.com\)](http://www.aetnacompassionatecare.com) offers online tools and information for the general public as well for Aetna members. The site includes:

- Information about care that is focused on quality of life, comfort and support
- Tips on how to begin a discussion with loved one to understand their end-of-life wishes
- Checklists of decisions to make and important documents to compile
- Resources and tips for caregivers

Additional useful websites:

- [Aetna's Compassionate Care site](http://www.aetnacompassionatecare.com)
- [National Family Caregivers Association site](http://www.nationalfamilycaregivers.org)
- [National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization site](http://www.nationalhospiceandpalliativecare.org)



TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS: (source: www.aetnacompassionatecare.com)

Many people care for a chronically ill or disabled spouse, parent or other family member. Care giving *can* be a rewarding experience, especially when you know that your care makes a positive difference. But, care giving can be hard. Here are a few tips to being a good caregiver:

- Take care of yourself
- Don't help too much -- let the person do as much as he or she can
- Ask for help
- Take pride in your care

TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS CONTINUED

1: Take Care of Yourself

Taking care of yourself is the most important step you can take as a caregiver. Caregivers are more likely to be at risk for colds and the flu. And they are more susceptible to chronic illness, such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

However, when caregivers take time to care for themselves, good things usually happen:

- They stay healthier.
- They feel better about themselves.
- They have more energy and enthusiasm and can keep giving care.

Make time for yourself

Below is a checklist of ways to find time for yourself.

- Get some exercise.
- Eat healthy meals and snacks.
- Make time for an activity you enjoy.
- Get regular medical and dental checkups

For more information, visit

www.aetnacompassionatecare.com

2: Don't Help Too Much

Even if they don't admit it, people like to help themselves. Every time you do something for a person that the person could have done without help, there is a double loss. First, your effort may have been wasted. Second, the person has missed an opportunity to help himself or herself.

As a caregiver, your primary goal is to give the person you are caring for the power and the permission to be in control of his or her own life (as much as possible).

Every act your loved one makes to maintain independence is a victory for you as a caregiver.

Empower your "patient"

Help the person you're caring for do things independently. Here are some ways to empower him or her:

- Let the person make as many decisions as possible.
- Simplify tasks.
- Make it easy to move around the house.
- Allow for mistakes and less-than-perfect results.
- Reward both the effort *and* the result.
- Give the person responsibility to care for

3: Ask for Help

If someone asks if there's anything you need, the answer should be a resounding "Yes." Letting others help can make your care giving easier. The more support you have, the more successful you are likely to be.

When family or friends offer to lend a hand, be ready with specific ideas. For example, you could ask them to:

- Pick up a few items at the grocery store.
- Fix a meal, do some cleaning or yard work.
- Stay with the person you care for so you can go out for a while.

Other ideas for finding help when caring for a loved one include:

- Hire a teenager or older adult to help for a few hours a day.
- Find a grocery store that delivers.
- Hire a home health aide or personal care assistant.
- Sign up for homemaker or chore services; look into "Meals on Wheels."

Useful services for caregivers

Services that may be useful to caregivers include the following:

- Respite care
- Adult day centers
- Adult foster care or board-and-care homes
- Nursing homes
- Hospice programs
- Support groups

Visit www.aetnacompassionatecare.com for details on the above services.

Find out if these services are available in your community. Look under "Senior Citizen Services" in the Yellow Pages.

4: Take Pride

Take pride in your efforts. Being a caregiver is not easy, and those who do it are special. Following the tips for care giving can help you feel good about yourself and the care you provide.

Product Corner: Aetna's Compassionate Care Program

The Aetna Compassionate Care program, launched in 2004, is a comprehensive program of expanded benefits, nurse case management and information. The goal? To help members and their families cope more effectively with the complex and emotional issues involved in care at the end of life. The program also provides tools and information that help patients and their caregivers with issues often associated with end-of-life care.

The package includes broadened coverage for hospice and palliative services *and* provides coverage for curative care while in hospice. Additionally, the program provides coverage for respite care and bereavement care services.

For more information, visit the Aetna Compassionate Care Program site at www.aetnacompassionatecare.com.