RELATIONSHIPS
CAREGIVING FOR YOUNG ADULTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Many readers of this publication are caring for an aging parent or spouse, but a few have an additional caregiving responsibility – an adult child who has always required special caregiving because of physical or emotional disabilities, or an adult child who has suffered some debilitating injury and now requires caregiving support, perhaps for the rest of his life.

More than 11 million Americans are providing care for a family member between the ages of 18 and 49, and this number is predicted to rise dramatically. Much of the increase will be due to the growing number of people who have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Many persons with autism are high-functioning and will generally be self-sufficient as adults, but many others will require lifetime assistance. In addition to persons with autism, another leading cause of young adult disability is Down syndrome. The average life expectancy of these persons has increased from 25 in 1983 to 60 today. Additionally, a significant number of adults require caregiving assistance because of chronic, serious mental/emotional disorders such as anxiety, depressive, addictive and psychotic disorders. And because of recent combat experience, many veterans are returning with significant physical and/or
mental caregiving needs. All this adds up to major caregiving responsibilities that are most often provided by family members. Three out of four young adults with developmental disabilities live at home.

Most families are finding ways to manage their caregiving responsibilities for young adults with a combination of personal and public resources. Many of these families, however, have no caregiving plans for when the caregiving provider (usually a parent) dies or is no longer able to provide care. How will the special needs adult cope then? Much of the answer depends on the level and type of need, but here are some options to consider:

- **Home health aides or personal care attendants.** These persons come to your home to provide a variety of assistance, from bathing and dressing to meal preparation and housecleaning.

- **Supported living arrangements.** These are group living arrangements, similar to assisted living communities for seniors, which are equipped to provide the level of support needed.

- **Day programs.** These community programs provide opportunities to develop social and life skills in a safe environment during the day. These programs are not usually residential, so other caregiving must be provided when the program is closed.

- **Assistive technology.** Technology support for special needs adults is increasing dramatically. From prosthetic limbs to voice-controlled computers to assistance animals, these options are helping adults maintain more independence longer.

- **Long-term care facilities.** Some adults’ caregiving needs are so great, or other sources of caregiving are so limited, that they require 24-hour residential care.

All of these caregiving support options involve costs – sometimes very expensive costs. Most family caregivers acknowledge the benefits and satisfaction they experience in providing care for a family member, for which there is no dollar amount. But quality long-term caregiving requires careful financial planning sooner rather than later. There may be no greater gift from a caregiver than a secure plan for future care.

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I think Florence Nightingale said it best, “The connection between the health and the dwelling of the population is one of the most important that exists.” You can improve the health of your home by following the 7 principles to a healthy home listed below.

1. **Keep Your Home DRY.** Too much moisture leads to excessive mold growth and attracts pests such as roaches, mice, rats, and dust mites. **ACTION STEPS:** Repair leaks; keep indoor humidity below 60%; make sure water drains away from your home’s foundation.

2. **Keep Your Home CLEAN.** Excess clutter, spills and debris lead to pest infestation and exposure to contaminants. **ACTION STEPS:** Clean regularly using a damp mop on the floors and a microfiber cloth to dust. Add a doormat to reduce tracking in contaminants.

3. **Keep Your Home PEST-FREE.** Exposure to dust mites, roaches and other pests may trigger allergies and asthma. **ACTION STEPS:** Keep pests out by sealing cracks and openings in your home and storing food in pest-resistant containers. Wash bedding in hot water weekly.

4. **Keep Your Home SAFE.** Falls, burns and poisonings are leading causes of injury in the home. **ACTION STEPS:** Remove one-third of the clutter in your home and all throw rugs that are not secured to the floor. Check the batteries in your smoke detectors.

5. **Keep Your Home CONTAMINANT-FREE.** You are exposed to several contaminants indoors, including radon and tobacco smoke. **ACTION STEPS:** Test your home for radon and don’t allow smoking indoors.

6. **Keep Your Home VENTILATED.** It is important for your home to bring in fresh air and get rid of contaminated air. **ACTION STEPS:** Use the kitchen fan when cooking and the bathroom fan when bathing. Check to be sure your dryer is vented to the outside.

7. **Keep Your Home MAINTAINED.** A home that is not routinely cared for is at risk of mold, pests, and tripping and falling hazards. **ACTION STEPS:** Twice a year, check your home for curb-appeal, and fix things before they become major problems.
FOOD & NUTRITION
SHOULD YOU AVOID “WHITE” FOODS?

Some doctors advise their patients to avoid all white foods. They find this a quick way to get people to eat less sugar, white flour and fried and mashed potatoes.

While some dark and brightly colored foods are more nutritious than their paler cousins, not all white food is bad. If you look at vegetables and fruits, many white or light-colored ones are very good for you. In their natural state or when they are prepared with little or no added sugar, fat and salt, they are all low in fat, calories and sodium and often are good sources of fiber. Many also contain important phytochemicals that can help to ward off disease.

Here are some healthy white vegetables and fruits that you will want to include in your meals and snacks. The best way to serve them is either raw, steamed, grilled, roasted, stir-fried or microwaved.

**Vegetables – All good to excellent sources of Vitamin C:**
- Cauliflower – also a good source of folate
- Garlic and onions
- Shallots – Also a good source of Vitamin A, B6, and manganese
- Ginger – Also a good source of magnesium and potassium
- Jerusalem artichoke – Good source of thiamin and iron
- Jicama
- Kohlrabi
- Mushrooms – Also high in riboflavin and a good source of niacin, copper and pantothenic acid
- Parsnips – Also a good source of folate
- Potatoes – Also a good source of potassium
- Turnip (try this raw in a salad or with a dip)
- White corn

**Fruits – all good sources of Vitamin C:**
- Bananas – also a good source of potassium
- Pears
- White peaches

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MAPLE-FILLED PEARS

This recipe is also good made with apples instead of pears

¼ cup golden or regular raisins
¼ cup light maple-flavored syrup
¼ teaspoon cinnamon or apple pie spice
¼ cup chopped pecans
½ teaspoon lemon peel (optional)
3 large fresh pears, pared, halved and cored

Makes 6 servings

1. Combine raisins, syrup, nuts, cinnamon and lemon peel. Set aside.
2. Arrange pears, cut side down, in microwave-safe baking dish. Cover with a lid or plastic wrap. Microwave on high for 5 minutes.
3. Turn pears over and fill with maple mixture. Microwave again for 3-4 minutes or until pears are tender.

Great served as a side dish with pork or turkey. Pears can also be chopped instead of halved and used as a topping for pancakes, waffles or cooked cereal once they are cooked.
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