

The Sandwich Generation

by Kathleen Bogolea, MS

Since the adoption of the National Family Caregiver Support Program in late 2000, there have been numerous news articles and points of interests written about the family caregiver and their many different roles within the family and the community. Roughly, it is estimated that American families provide 80 to 90 percent of all in-home long term care services for their aging family members, disabled adult children, and other loved ones.

These services may include assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs), medical services coordination, medical supervision, administration of medications, and assistance with financial, legal, spiritual, and emotional concerns. These services are priceless and the family caregivers that provide them often go unrecognized and over utilized which can lead to great stress for the family caregiver. In contrast, if these same services were to be provided by our national health care system, it would be estimated at approximately 250 billion dollars per year.

Recently, and of particular interest, there is a new buzz around a subset of caregivers known as the “Sandwich Generation.”



These are caregivers who find themselves squeezed in between caring for younger loved ones such as children, and their elder parents or other elder family members. While the Sandwich Generation is not a new form of family caregiving, these caregivers are receiving a long overdue peaking of interest within American society.

Currently, the typical American Sandwich Generation Caregiver is in her mid-forties, married, employed and cares for her family and an elderly parent, usually her mother. With this said, it is important to note that there are more and more men that find themselves in a caregiving role and even squeezed in between the generations. It is also important to note that there is an ever-growing segment of family and sandwich generation caregivers that live in rural communities. Unlike caregivers living in urban and industrial areas, rural caregivers may find themselves removed from readily available and professionally organized supportive services and care networks. They may also find themselves not only carrying the normal burdens that are associated with providing care for a loved one, but also, they may be faced with challenges such as geographic barriers to resources and isolation from other caregivers, family members, or informal supports. This lack of service availability, care networks, and isolation from other caregivers and family members can add to caregiver stress, burnout, and depression.

The demanding role of being a caregiver spreads across all racial, gender, age, and ethnic boundaries. Some of the common stressors that affect both urban and rural sandwich generation caregivers are:

- How do I split my time between my children/family and my elder loved one?
- How much of my time is too much time in each caregiving role?
- How do I find the time for my marriage?
- How do I find the time for me?

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Mission

To provide a comprehensive and coordinated system of services designed to promote the independence and dignity of older persons and their families in Muskegon, Oceana, and Ottawa – a mission compelling us to target older persons in greatest need but to advocate for all.



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- How do I keep the generational peace between my kids and my elder loved one?
- How do I find the resources that I need for myself and my loved one?
- How do I combat my feelings of isolation?
- Guilt, Guilt, and more Guilt for not having enough time to accomplish all that “should” be doing.

To counteract some of these stressors, here are some caregiver tips that may help sandwich generation caregivers along the way:

Hold a Family Meeting

At this meeting, discuss the many different caregiving tasks that need to be accomplished each day or week. Set a task list for family members to complete each day/week. Set mutual expectations of how the many tasks of caregiving will be accomplished. Caregiving is often a one-person show, but it does not need to be if you have family support. The family meeting also allows for family members to participate and share in the valuable gift of caregiving, and this can be very rewarding.

Communication

Encourage children and elderly people to communicate with one another. During the family meeting, make sure that all family members have a chance to talk about their thoughts and feelings.

Ask for Assistance

Make a point of picking up the telephone and spending time calling resources such as your local Area Agency on Aging, a hospital social worker, a physician, or church. The Internet can also be a wonderful resource finding tool. Never be afraid to ask for assistance when you need to; you may be surprised at who has been waiting to help you.

Take Time to Care Yourself

Too often I meet caregivers who are run down and even sick because they have not taken time to care for themselves. Sure, no one can take care of your loved ones as well as you do but you must care for yourself if you want to continue to care for your loved one. This is not an act of selfishness; it is an act of great giving.

Take time every day to “check-in” with yourself, even if it is only 10 minutes. This should be your protected time. Enjoy this time by reading, listening to music, exercising, or whatever you like to do.

- Remember to laugh at the funny things in life.
- Listen to your body. If your body is telling you to slow down, or that something is not right, seek medical advice. Too often we do not listen to our bodies no matter how loudly they may be talking to us.



Every caregiver and caregiving situation is unique but there are always common factors which bridge these situations and caregivers together. It is easy to become lost in the caregiving that you are providing but remember that support can come from many different sources and in many ways. For those of you who are squeezed in the sandwich generation please know that you are not alone, and that assistance is often only a telephone call or internet site away. Your local Family Caregiver Support Program is here to help you. ❖

Living with Heart Failure: These lifestyle changes can help.

Source: *National Institutes of Health*

Following a heart healthy diet is a very important part of managing heart failure. In fact, not having a proper diet can make heart failure worse. Talk with your doctor and health care team to create an eating plan that works for you.



A heart healthy diet includes a variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. It also includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, and fat-free or low-fat milk or milk products. A healthy diet is low in saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, sodium (salt) and added sugar.

Your doctor will probably recommend that you follow a diet low in salt because

salt can cause extra fluid to build up in your body, making heart failure worse.

Watch Fluid Intake

Drinking too much fluid can worsen heart failure, so it's important for people who have heart failure to drink the correct amounts and types of fluid. Talk with your doctor about what amounts and types of fluid you should have each day.

Weigh yourself every day, and let your doctor know right away if you have sudden weight gain. This could mean extra fluid is building up. Also, if you have heart failure, you shouldn't drink alcohol.

Control Risk Factors

Taking steps to control risk factors for coronary artery disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes will help control heart failure. If you have diabetes or high blood pressure, work with your health care team to control these conditions. Have your blood sugar level and blood pressure checked. Talk with your doctor about when you should have tests and how often to take measurements at home.

Other steps you can take.

- Lose weight if you're overweight or obese. Work with your health care team to lose weight safely.

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March's Website

www.Dementiaminds.org

Quotes

"Everyone is Irish on St Patrick's Day."
– George Bernard Shaw

*"May you live as long as you want,
and never want as long as you live."*
– Irish blessing

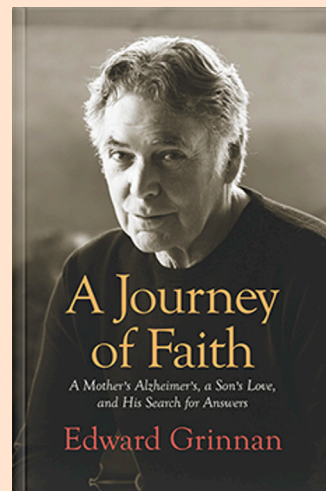
*"There's no such thing as bad weather,
only inappropriate clothing."*
– Irish proverb

This Month's Book

A Journey of Faith

by Edward Grinnan

Edward Grinnan, Guideposts Editor-in-chief, understands the fear and panic of memory loss and Alzheimer's all too well.



Who Am I? Scrapbook

by Lynn Lancaster Gorges

We know all about our loved ones we care for, but how can we help their other caregivers know them in a similar way? It can be done rather easily with a fun and easy project—a scrapbook. What a wonderful way to help the caregiver know the patient much more quickly.

This can be a fantastic project for the entire family of home bound or nursing home residents. You can create a simple or elaborate scrapbook that will tell all about the person's life prior to their failing health. An individual can take on this project, or it can involve the honoree, their spouse, their children, their grandchildren, and their friends. What a fun family project!



Begin by deciding what you will want in your scrapbook. You can dedicate a page each to many topics. These will be great beginnings for lots of conversation with the honoree. Here are just a few suggestions:

- Childhood
- Education
- Homes/where I lived.
- Spouse
- Other family members
- Occupations
- Hobbies
- Clubs
- Church activities
- Pets
- Sports interests
- Favorite vacations
- Friends
- Artwork done by grandchildren.
- Health history

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Living with Heart Failure, continued from page 5

- Do physical activity as your doctor directs you to become more fit and stay as active as possible.
- Quit smoking and avoid using illegal drugs. Talk with your doctor about programs and products that can help you quit smoking. Also, try to avoid secondhand smoke. Smoking and drugs can worsen heart failure and harm your health. For help to quit smoking, visit Smokefree.gov or call toll-free, 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669).
- Get enough rest.



Care for Advanced Stages

As heart failure worsens, lifestyle changes and medicines may no longer control your symptoms. You may need a medical procedure or surgery.

Signs to Watch Out For

You should watch for signs that heart failure is getting worse. For example, weight gain may mean that fluids are building up in your body. Ask your doctor how often you should check your weight and when to report weight changes.

Oxygen Therapy

Many people who have severe heart failure may need treatment in a hospital from time to time. Your doctor may recommend oxygen therapy (oxygen given through nasal prongs or a mask). Oxygen therapy can be given in a hospital or at home.

People with heart failure should try to avoid respiratory infections like pneumonia and the flu. Ask your doctor about getting vaccinated against pneumonia and influenza. Your doctor may also order extra oxygen if you have trouble breathing. The oxygen can be used in your home or in the hospital.

Implantable Devices

If you have heart damage and severe heart failure symptoms, your doctor might recommend a cardiac resynchronization therapy (CRT) device or an implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD).

In heart failure, the right and left sides of the heart may no longer contract at the same time. This disrupts the heart's pumping. To correct this problem, your doctor might implant a CRT device (a type of pacemaker) near your heart.

This device helps both sides of your heart contract at the same time, which can decrease heart failure symptoms.

Some people who have heart failure have very rapid, irregular heartbeats. Without treatment, these heartbeats can cause sudden cardiac arrest. Your doctor might implant an ICD near your heart to solve this problem. An ICD checks your heart rate and uses electrical pulses to correct irregular heart rhythms.

If Symptoms Are More Severe

- People who have severe heart failure symptoms at rest, despite other treatments, may need:
- A mechanical heart pump, such as a left ventricular assist device. This device helps pump blood from the heart to the rest of the body. You may use a heart pump until you have surgery or as a long-term treatment.
- A heart transplant. A heart transplant is an operation in which a person's diseased heart is replaced with a healthy heart from a deceased donor. Heart transplants are done as a life-saving measure for end-stage heart failure when medical treatment and less drastic surgery have failed. ❖

The Stay Healthy Checklist

by Malika Brown, MSW, LSW

Caregivers tend to put their health last on their list of priorities. They usually put the needs of their loved ones first. However, the stress caregivers experience makes their health issues more important than ever. Here is a checklist of ways for you to stay fit, both physically and mentally:

Organize!

Invest in a weekly planner for on the go and a calendar to hang on the wall at home. This will assist with keeping track of doctor appointments (yours and your loved one's), shopping days, when bills are due, or time to yourself (yes, you should schedule that in, too). You can try a program like Google Calendar, which includes a color coordinator. Therefore, your appointments and tasks can be one color, while your loved one's appointments can be another color.



Keep your appointments!

Don't neglect your health needs! Make sure to visit your doctors regularly. This includes your specialists if you have any. Your heart health, breast health, prostate health, foot care, and dental care are also very important to your overall well-being. Make sure to keep up to date with these doctors as well. You can always use your planner to keep track of your appointments!

Buy healthy snacks!

Caregivers are usually so busy taking care of others, they don't think about what they're eating. While it's easy to go grab a slice of pizza or make a pit stop at McDonald's, a little preparation the night before can help nip bad habits in the bud. Add peanut butter to celery sticks, grab a baggie of bran cereal, bring along some string cheese and grapes or an apple. These are easy to make and place in

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Who Am I? Scrapbook, continued from page 4

Secondly, make a list of supplies you will need. If you have a scrapbooker in the family, this project can take on a more creative and polished look. Primarily, remember that the book needs to give lots of information.

The basic materials needed are:

- 3 ring notebook or photo album
- Plastic sheet protectors to slide the sheets into if using a notebook.
- Black felt tip pen if writing by hand.
- Photographs
- Adhesives – glue stick, etc.
- Paper
- Optional Supplies:
 - Recycled greeting cards.
 - Newspaper clipping (copy)
 - Scrap book art supplies
 - Certificates (copy)
 - Colorful markers

Note: If you use a computer, make sure the font is rather large and easy to read. Keep the written text brief. Put together the book so that the reader can scan it and get lots of information from it. Use lots of pictures if possible. The basic set up of the book can vary, but always have a front cover that will celebrate the honoree's life. The title page should include a picture of the honoree, and the person's name. Then write a note at the bottom inviting caregivers and visitors to view the book. You can even put a title on it—WHO AM I? THIS IS MY LIFE, A BIOGRAPHY OF _____.

Now get out the supplies and let the fun begin!!! I promise that all who help make this wonderful informative book will have a great time creating a biography of their loved one's life. And the finished product will guarantee many hours of enjoyment for all who read it. Most of all, the honoree will love the attention it will focus on him or her. In the future, it will become a treasured family heirloom! ❖

Participation In Everyday Activities

Source: *Trualta*

Consider Unique Needs & Preferences

- Consider what your care recipient needs, like reminders or simple step-by-step instructions.
- Consider their activity level. Do they spend most of their time sitting, or do they like to be more active?
- Think about unsuccessful past activities. What didn't work and how can you change it for future activities?

Incorporate Past Interests & Roles

- Consider important or interesting activities to your care recipient. Did they always do the dishes, or did they love gardening?
- Was your care recipient a parent, or do they love animals? Involve them in caregiving activities with stuffed animals, dolls, or household pets.



Spark Interest

- Make the activity part of a daily routine you keep posted on the refrigerator.
- Put the activity in a visible place. For example, put a basket of mismatched socks on the kitchen table.

The Stay Healthy Checklist, continued from page 5

sandwich bags the night before, so at least when you grab something to eat, it's a little healthier than before.

Exercise whenever possible!

I know this seems like the most difficult thing to fit into your schedule, but it is one of the best ways to stay fit and energized. If you can take a small walk around your neighborhood, even with your loved one, it can make a big difference. You can also do small exercises while at home – lunges, sit-ups, and even stretching can keep you energized throughout the day. You can even do exercises with your loved one if it is safe for them.

Take time for yourself!

Take a walk, treat yourself to the movies, attend church, volunteer a couple of hours a week, or curl up and read a book. All of these are ways you can make time for yourself. This is important to keep down stress levels and allow you to regroup. This may also seem too difficult to achieve, but even 20 minutes a day can make you feel re-energized.

The most loving gift a person can give to one's family is to put their affairs in order before a disaster or medical emergency.

- All bank accounts, account numbers and types of accounts and the location of banks.
- Insurance Company, policy number, beneficiary as stated on the policies and type of insurance (health, life, long term care, automobile, etc.)
- Deed and titles to ALL property.
- Loan/lien information, who holds them and if there are any death provisions.
- Social Security and Medicare numbers.
- Military history, affiliations, and papers (including discharge papers).
- Up to date will be in a safe place (inform family where the Will is located).
- Living Will or other Advanced Directive appropriate to your state of residence.
- Durable Power of Attorney.
- Instructions for funeral services and burial (if arrangements have been secured, name and location of funeral home.)

There are many things that caregivers can do to help themselves and their loved ones prepare for any type of emergency or disaster, but it is best to be ready well in advance, before a dire situation arises. Remember to contact your local fire department or your community's emergency management office for help with your preparations.

- A battery-powered radio, flashlight, and plenty of extra batteries.
- A first-aid kit, prescription medicines, and an extra pair of glasses.

- A supply of water (one gallon per person per day); store water in sealed, unbreakable containers and replace it every six months; a supply of non-perishable food and a non-electric can opener, plus any special foods your loved one may require.
- Include extra products like adult diapers, wipes, lotion, and other hygiene items that don't need water to use.
- Have extra wheelchair batteries charged and ready to go.
- Have on-hand full oxygen tanks, extra medications, catheters, food for guide or service dogs, and any other special equipment needed.
- A change of clothing and rain gear for your loved one, and sturdy shoes for you.
- Extra blankets or sleeping bags.
- The list of family physicians, relatives or friends who should be notified if you or your loved one are injured.
- A list of the style and serial numbers of medical devices such as pacemakers or special batteries for essential medical equipment.
- An extra set of car keys. ❖

Three Ways Music May Impact You

☞ *Reducing loneliness* ☞

Music may connect you with others, even when you can't be together.

☞ *Influencing your mood* ☞

A favorite tune can calm you on a frustrating day.

☞ *Decreasing pain* ☞

Research suggests that music therapy can reduce the intensity of chronic pain.



Participation in Everyday, continued from page 6

- Find ways to make the task sound enjoyable to your care recipient. For example, ask them to come with you on a special trip to the grocery store to get items for a favorite meal.



- Asking “Can you help me with this?” may help them feel valued and needed.
- Try saying “I would love to know your opinion on ___” to make them feel included.

Keep It Simple

- Modify the activity. Can you reduce the number of rules in a card game, or lay out 2 outfits to choose from instead of their whole closet?
- Take on parts of the task that your care recipient has trouble with and let them do the rest.
- Be flexible. If your care recipient does not want to do something, don't make them. You can always come back to it later.

Set Realistic Goals

- Engaging in an activity can mean different things to different people. For example, your care recipient may like to play a game of dominoes or prefer arranging them into shapes or stack piles. It matters most that they're engaging.
- Even doing the simplest of activities can help your care recipient feel like they are involved in something. ❖

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◆◆◆ **DAY** ◆◆◆

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