



LOVE notes

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Caring for Aging Parents

Sandra is a 50 year old mother of 3 who works part-time as a nurse and lives with her husband and children in a small town in Alabama. She spends most of her time caring for others, her patients, her children, and their dog. Recently, Sandra's mother was hospitalized for a stroke, and now that she is leaving the hospital, Sandra will also be taking care of her mother who will be moving in with her because she can no longer live on her own. Does this story sound familiar? With people living longer now than ever before, more and more Americans are finding themselves in the "Sandwich Generation," where they are still caring for their children and now must take on the responsibility of caring for an aging parent.

The caregiver role and your marriage

Making the transition from receiving a parent's assistance to providing can be rewarding and give you a chance to spend more time with them or repay them for everything they've done for you. It can also bring with it a lot of stress, not just for the person whose parent it is but for the spouse and family as well. Even if your parents don't quite require the kind of care that leads them to live with you, you may find yourself taking them shopping, assisting with household chores, preparing meals, managing their health needs, and sometimes even their finances. Women are more likely to take on the extra responsibility of caring for parents than men, even when the aging parents are their in-laws. The added stress, responsibilities, and the tough decisions that often need to be

made increase a woman's risk for depression, decrease job performance, and have a negative effect on marital relationships.

Caregivers have been found to experience more distress on days they actively care for parents, which is likely then to affect interactions with a spouse or partner, creating a higher risk for marital discord. Couples also tend to argue about decisions related to the parent's finances, living arrangements, or even how each person is contributing. Specifically, women who find themselves caring for their partner's parents may begin to feel unfairly burdened or unappreciated.

Involving others

It is not necessary or wise to try to take on this "sandwich generation" burden on your own.

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Caregivers with this kind of superhero approach end up neglecting their own health, well-being, careers, and relationships with spouses, friends, and other family members. Instead, make it a family affair.

When possible, caring for parents should be made into a team effort. If you have siblings who live nearby, the decision over who will take on the responsibility for aging parents can be a difficult one. Taking a team approach can help ensure that the entire burden doesn't fall on one single person, and it's recommended when possible. Unfortunately, fewer families these days live in the same town or even state, and the odds are that the child who lives closest to the parents will likely end up doing most of the caregiving, at least as long as the parent's remain in their own home.

Even if you are able to get siblings involved in providing care, the overall experience can still

be stressful and take a toll on your marriage. Make sure that you don't go it alone. Be realistic about what you can and cannot take on and make sure you ask for help when you need it. Talk to your partner about your experiences and concerns, and involve him or her in decisions. In addition to the added stress, caring for aging parents can also be a very emotional experience, especially if there are serious health concerns. Opening up to your partner can help ease your burden and allow them to provide you with the support you need.

Berman, C. (2005). *Caring for yourself while caring for your aging parents: How to help, how to survive*. New York: Owl Books.

Chassin, L., Macy, J. T., Seo, D, Presson, C. C., & Sherman, S. J. (2010). The association between membership in the sandwich generation and health behaviors: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 31, 38-46.

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try this...

1. Making caring for parents into a team effort. Enlist the help of siblings and others.
2. Talk with your partner. Share thoughts and concerns in the decision-making process.
3. Plan ahead. If your parents are not dependent on your care now, discuss with them what they expect in the future.