

Caring for an Elderly Loved One Can Be Tough on Families

About 43-million of us are currently taking care of an elderly loved one. A new study from the AARP finds that many caregivers don't feel like they get much help from siblings or spouses, which can lead to family tension. Families these days are more spread out than they used to be. It's typical for daughters and sons to live hundreds or thousands of miles away from their parents. So what normally happens, when mom and dad get old or sick, is that the kid who lives closest ends up becoming the primary caregiver. The other siblings continue on with their lives, jobs and families, occasionally calling to get an update on their parent's health.

According to an article in *Time* magazine, that leaves the person handling the care feeling isolated, overwhelmed and stressed out. They feel especially alone because they're living with their parent's health issues every day. They're intimately involved with medications, feeding schedules and their parent's deteriorating condition, but their siblings aren't. When siblings or family do visit, it's common for parents to put on a brave face and mislead them about how bad their health problems really are. Caring for an elderly parent is always difficult. It's hard to watch a person that you looked to for strength, get weaker and weaker. It doesn't have to pull you and your siblings apart.

- If you're the out-of-towner, be available to the sister or brother living with the parent. They'll probably need to vent often, especially if Alzheimer's or dementia is involved. Listen to them, believe them and support them.
- Also, your parents are everyone's responsibility, so plan to spend vacations doing parent duty. If it's possible, **move** to help take the pressure off of one sibling.
- If you're the caregiver, tell people what you need. ***Don't try to be a hero.*** If you need help, whether it's a couple days off or a few extra dollars ask for it. It's important that you know that you and your brothers and sisters are in this together. If you need a little extra help or advice, check out Caring.com. They have tips and advice and an online support group for people caring for their aging parents.