

Caregiving Is Becoming The New Normal For Baby Boomers

(NAPS)—According to a new report, a growing number of baby boomers are caregivers and don't realize it.

That's because many think that providing hands-on help to an aging loved one is just a regular part of life. However, according to recent AARP Public Policy Institute research, this is actually considered a viable form of caregiving.

For example, if you drive your mom to her monthly doctor's appointments, or maybe on a regular basis you help your aging uncle check his blood sugar levels for diabetes—all of these activities fall into the caregiving category.

The "New Normal"

Increasingly, people are providing this type of daily care to family members, but they may even provide other complex levels of care, including tube feedings, bandaging and wound care, managing catheters, giving injections or operating medical equipment.

Additionally, spouses or younger family members who are providing this multifaceted care are doing so with little to no training or preparation, an added stressor found in many at-home caregiving situations.

According to AARP's senior vice president for Public Policy, Susan Reinhard, "Most caregivers don't think of what they're doing as work. They think of it as what families do for each other. They don't think of themselves as caregivers."

The report found the impact of shorter hospital stays, limited hospital discharge planning and the spread of home-based medical technologies all are reflected in the complex and physically demanding nursing tasks that fam-



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ily caregivers are increasingly carrying out in the home. AARP defines this new level of care as "the new normal."

Within this so-called "new normal" realm of caregiving, approximately one in four adults in the U.S. are taking care of an adult family member, partner or friend. Also, since many baby boomers are expected to live longer, planning for the future has become critically important.

Tips For Caregivers

To help boomers and caregivers manage some of the daily tasks that go along with this "labor of love," AARP offers some helpful tips.

- First, boomers should not be in denial about needing some help later in life or even unexpectedly. With higher rates of divorce, people who never married, and those who are childless, older boomers may be competing for attention from a smaller pool of extended family and friends.

- Therefore, you should make a plan to position yourself—be it in your home or community life—so you can stay active and involved

in the things you love.

- Think about whether where you live now or where you might like to live would be a good place if you didn't drive. Ask yourself, could you get around your house with limited mobility? Or, would there be people or services nearby to help if you needed it?

- Finally, be sure to include the cost of long-term care or other services when calculating expenses in retirement.

The Need For Self Care

If you are a caregiver, be sure to put your health first and ahead of all other priorities. Caregiving, while often rewarding, is physically and emotionally demanding work. What's more, you can't care for someone if you don't take care of yourself. Be sure to eat nutritious meals, get enough rest, see your doctor regularly and exercise.

In addition to self care, be sure to ask for help. For instance, make a "to-do-list" and recruit relatives and friends to pitch in. Furthermore, be sure to use community resources. Most communities have services that can help coordinate your loved one's care and provide help with meals, housekeeping, grooming or transportation.

Also, you need to get organized. Calendars can help you prioritize your responsibilities. What's more, don't be afraid to just say no. Accept the fact that you simply can't do everything. Resist the urge to take on more than you can handle. Finally, stay positive. Instead of dwelling on what you can't do, recognize how much of a contribution you do make.

For more helpful information and details on the new AARP report, visit AARP.org/caregivers.