



The Upbeat

May 2021, Volume 3



Hello Spring!

To all our members,

As Spring begins to flourish and hints of Summer start to emerge it reminds us of the renewal that Spring represents. In the US, over 40 million adults provide support and care for others - family or friends. We dedicate this issue to these heroes among us - our caregivers. We have enclosed some helpful hints for our caregivers to find the support we need to both provide great care for those we love and to renew ourselves for the brighter future ahead.

Be well and healthy. Continue to stay safe and keep your mind positive. If we can be of support please contact us.

Mark Friedman

VP Services & Operations, Assured Allies

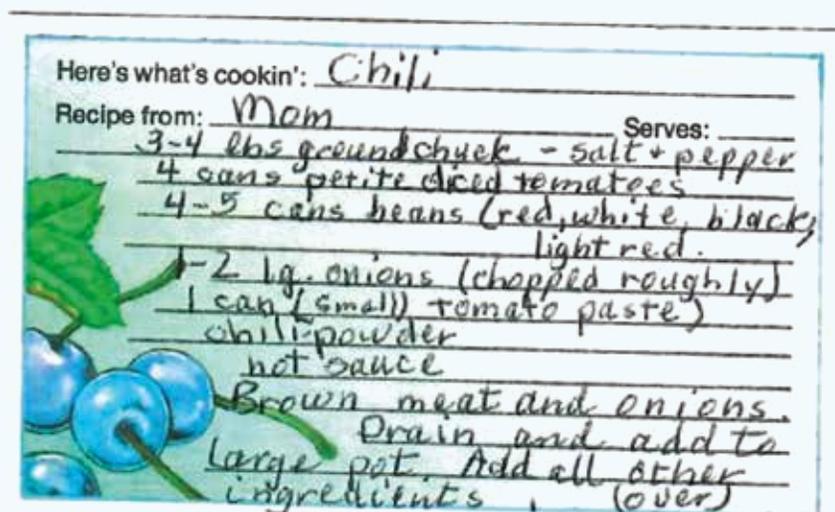
Cook and “break bread” with loved ones to beat the COVID blues

By Sahra Pak

There really is nothing like gathering with loved ones and spending time in one of the most welcoming spaces in one’s home - the kitchen. Sharing time in this room with your loved ones brings effortless laughter, joy, and lighthearted moments. We are wired to love connecting with others through cooking and sharing meals. During the pandemic, some families have adjusted to create a “safe zone” where only the closest family members convene (“COVID bubble”) to cook and eat together.

You may be wondering, “Enjoying a meal together feels good but is there really a tangible benefit?” And the answer is a resounding yes! There is actually science behind the notion of how we connect with others by “breaking bread” together. Studies have found that when we cook and eat the same food or meals together, it makes us feel closer to each other by increasing the amount of trust we have for one another. Researchers think that food may play a role in shaping trust and cooperation since what we put in our body is so intimate and vital. In addition, when you cook with your loved ones, you are sharing your culture, traditions, and heritage with each other which further strengthens the bond between friends and family. This is why so many of us want to flock to the kitchen and eat good food together on a daily basis.

Mark's Mom's Chili Recipe



Spices should be added to taste! Simmer 1 1/2 - 2 hrs.
You can increase tomatoes and beans (and meat amounts as you want!)
Enjoy! 😊

Remember - I taste and add accordingly!

Caring for Caregivers

By Marissa Levenson, MSW

Caregiving for a loved one can be a rewarding, yet challenging endeavor. Caregiving takes a very real toll on caregivers' mental, physical, emotional and financial health, and can lead to burnout. It can be easy for caregivers to forget about their own health and wellbeing with so much else going on, but self-care is essential to preventing burnout. Below, we provide 4 tips for caregiver self-care:

Try to reduce stress

To help reduce stress, first, identify the biggest stressors for you - is it family disagreements? Difficulty saying "no" and feeling stretched thin? Not having enough help? Of the stressors you are experiencing, what can you change about them? For example, practice saying, "no" to things you know you don't have capacity for. If you are stressed by all the housework you need to do, consider hiring a housekeeper. To help deal with ongoing stress or stress from things you cannot change, find healthy outlets you enjoy, like meditation, going for a walk, or having lunch with a friend to vent.

Ask for (and accept) help

It can be really difficult for anyone to ask for help when they are struggling, and caregivers may feel a sense of guilt asking others to help shoulder the burden, but as the saying goes, "it takes a village." Create a list of tasks you could use help with, and consider the abilities and interests of the people in your life. For example, if you have a friend who really likes cooking, you could ask them to prepare a meal once a week for the person you are caring for. Being specific in your requests will also help friends and family make a commitment to helping. For example, "can you please take Mom to her appointment next Thursday at 10" will likely yield better results than, "do you think you could drive mom to an appointment some time?"

Learn what resources are available to you

There are a lot of resources out there for caregivers - in your local community and online. Your local Council on Aging or Area Agency on Aging is a great place to start when looking for caregiver resources in your area (visit www.eldercare.acl.gov or call 1-800-677-1116 to find your AAA). Your employer may even offer an Employee Assistance Program for family caregivers. There is also an abundance of online support communities for caregivers, such as Working Daughter (www.workingdaughter.com) or Facebook caregiver support groups (check out the Caregivers Hub Support Group on Facebook). AARP, the Family Caregiver Alliance (800-445-8106), and disease-specific organizations like the Alzheimer's Association have tons of resources, including educational information, assistance with local service navigation, and caregiver support programs. You can also visit our website www.assured.care/resources for additional resources.

Take time for yourself

One of the most important ways to care for yourself as a caregiver is to set aside dedicated time to care for your own mental, emotional and physical health. This could be anything from making sure to attend your own medical appointments, to setting aside time for a daily walk by yourself, to taking a couple days off from caregiving altogether and having someone else take over the usual tasks. You deserve (and need) a break every once in a while!



Remember, caregivers, you are not alone! According to AARP, in 2020, there were approximately 43 million family caregivers providing unpaid care to someone age 50+. There is lots of support out there for family caregivers, but unfortunately, it often remains a well-kept secret. We hope you feel empowered to become a SUPPORTED caregiver.

Using Telemedicine to Treat Seniors' Mental Health

By Allison Robbie

The pandemic is causing people to feel more stressed, grief, anxiety, and worry. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, these are very natural responses to this difficult situation. While there are ways to manage these negative emotions, not everyone is equipped to handle them effectively. There are times when getting professional help is the best course of action. And the elderly are particularly vulnerable to both the virus and the bouts of mental health.

The effects of COVID-19 on mental health

For seniors, there has been a lot of fear and anxiety during the COVID-19 crisis. This is the age group that's been hit the worst – they're getting the sickest and they comprise a sizeable percentage of those who passed away from the virus.

It's especially difficult for seniors to maintain relationships and links to people outside of their homes. Most socializing now occurs online, so they're at an obvious disadvantage. Most of them aren't technologically savvy. A recent study found that the pandemic has taken a severe toll on seniors' mental health. Due to social distancing measures and stay-at-home protocols, 17% of seniors 65 and older feel isolated, while 26% have higher risks of early death due to loneliness.

Moreover, the pandemic's mental health impacts have even stretched to family caregivers who look after seniors. Caregivers carry the psychological burden of keeping their senior loved ones healthy and safe, even before the pandemic. Add in the stress and anxiety over contracting the virus, possible financial struggles, and the inability to access much-needed health services, caregiving is proving to be a much harder task than it already was to start with.

How telemedicine helps

Telemedicine gives seniors access to mental health professionals, easing the strain on both the seniors' and caregivers' mental stress. However, while telehealth does connect more senior patients to psychiatrists, there's still a shortage of these specialists to contend with. Fortunately, telehealth gives patients the option to obtain care from different types of mental health professionals, such as mental health nurses.

Plus, telehealth also gave rise to the widespread adoption of online healthcare learning. This strategy helps produce more graduates, addressing the shortages in specialized care. Nowadays, nurses can take online RN to BSN programs to upskill and advance their careers. Through these programs, nurses can earn specializations in sought-after tracks including mental health nursing. The Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education deems these online programs just as valid as traditional ones. This makes them great options for practicing nurses who want to advance their careers without taking time away from work due to the lessons being taught purely online. As these mental health nurses are trained specifically in psychotherapy and psychopharmacology, they're fully equipped to handle telemedicine sessions for mental health. Telemedicine opens up lines of communication to alternative mental health professionals like these advanced-practice nurses.

Guiding seniors through telemedicine sessions

Caregivers are responsible for helping seniors through the telemedicine process. While the virtual calls can be set up by caregivers, seniors who can perform the task for themselves should be encouraged to do so. But when explaining technology to them, it's important to break down the process step-by-step using simple language.

Start with explaining the value of mental health telemedicine before walking them through a practice session. It would also benefit seniors to have written instructions clearly outlined. After running through a session, have them repeat the process until they get comfortable with it. Remember to be patient and give them encouragement. Even care teams are struggling with the transition to telemedicine, so it's even tougher for the senior demographic. They have to learn new technologies on top of adjusting to a new medium of care.

The pandemic may have exacerbated mental health issues in the elderly and their caregivers, but it also made telemedicine more commonplace. Having this type of access to much-needed mental health assistance could make all the difference between suffering mental distress and thriving.



Source: Pexels

Technology to Help Support Caregivers and Their Recipients

By Angelina Portuense

As a caregiver, the thought that the person you are caring for may need additional support, whether it be now or in the future, is often recurring. So what can caregivers do when it seems like more care or additional supervision is required?

While most people would consider getting additional in-person help, we want to highlight technologic devices as a potential alternative to help provide support, oversight and care.

Medical Alert System with GPS

There are several companies who provide medical alert systems that offer a GPS locator feature. Commonly known, basic alert systems provide assurance that when an emergency arises, a push of a wearable call button can summon assistance. Once a medical alert button is pressed, the call is picked up by a dispatcher who inquires about the emergency and if applicable, sends emergency assistance. In the basic medical alert systems, individuals can only use the button within the range of their home and they do not offer a GPS locator. Companies like Philips Lifeline offer in addition to their base medical alert model, a system called GoSafe 2 which allows advanced locating technologies, two way voice communication and fall detection. This device will help caregivers have peace of mind that their loved ones can have immediate assistance in case of an emergency.

Medication Dispensers & Reminder Tools

Remembering to take medications can be difficult to do for any age, especially if the medications are required to be taken at a specific time of day. There are devices and applications for a smartphone that provide reminders and oversight of medication management. There are a number of medication devices on the market that can be filled every 30-90 days by a caregiver, be programmed to sound an alert reminder and dispense medications to a care recipient. An example of this is the HERO system which provides caregiver notifications. There are also just regular smart phone tracking options such as Medisafe, which allows users to store medication lists and set reminders to take them. When medications are entered, the app allows users to store details about those medications such as storing its dosage, frequency, time of day it is taken (setting the reminder alarm), the appearance of the pill, how many pills are left (with the option to set a reminder when you have X pills left), the prescription number, and the condition the medication is for. The app allows the user to mark whether or not the medication was taken, or reschedule them for another time. In terms of how the app can benefit caregivers, well, Medisafe allows users to add a Medfriend, who can receive text messages, emails, or phone calls if medications are not marked as taken. Users can also pull up a report of weekly adherence, which can be helpful for caregivers to review.

Caring from Afar

It may be hard to imagine that you could ensure that your loved one is getting out of bed, preparing something to eat or leaving the house to get to their doctor's appointment without actually being there to see it with your own eyes; however, it is indeed possible! Amada Senior Care's BeClose with Amada is a product that enhances a care recipient's independence and increases a caregiver's comfort. The BeClose with Amada is a tool that allows you to monitor the safety and activities of your

loved one. Smart Sensors are placed in high-traffic areas of the care recipients home (such as bedroom, living room, kitchen, and bathroom) and sends real time alerts via phone, text or e-mail to a designated caregiver so immediate action can be taken in the case of an emergency. The BeClose system receives data reports from these sensors to track trends and vulnerabilities for the senior. The sensors notice if something is out of the ordinary and will alert the caregiver.

At Assured Allies we aim to not only help older adults, but their caregivers too! With technological advances, devices geared towards allowing individuals to age independently have been improving the likelihood of aging in place.



Have You Considered A Support Group?

By Angelina Portuense

Whether you have been a caregiver for 2 weeks or 10 years, it is likely that you have experienced both the happy moments and stressful ones associated with being a support for someone else. Being an informal caregiver and providing emotional, physical or even social support may be hard for you to provide, especially if you were thrust into the role. If you start to feel overwhelmed, one way to get support as a caregiver is to join a caregiver support group.

What is a support group

Generally speaking, a caregiver support group is a safe space for individuals to gather, socialize, share advice and give encouragement to one another. Groups are overseen and led by a facilitator, a person who has experience or knowledge around the group topic. Meetings are typically held once a month and are one hour to one and a half hours in length. Participants share their experiences and form connections with other participants in similar situations/roles.

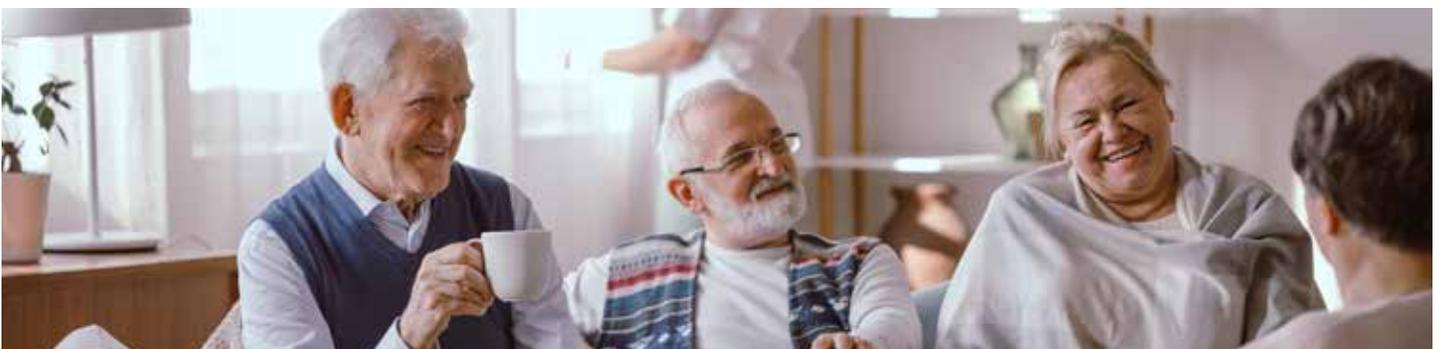
Why should you consider one

The feeling of mental, physical or emotional exhaustion is actually quite common amongst caregivers; in fact, these feelings mixed with the role is termed “caregiver burnout”. According to AgingInPlace.org, three quarters of the websites survey caregiver respondents found the role of being a caregiver stressful and more than half found it to be overwhelming. Signs of burnout include feelings of tiredness, overreacting to minor nuisances, irritability and difficulty sleeping. To help avoid burnout or cope with current feelings of burnout, a caregiver support group is an ideal option.

Tips for finding a caregiver support group

A majority of caregiver support groups are open to anyone providing help; There are also diagnosis or relationship specific groups available depending on your location or medium preference (in-person, by telephone or on-line). Caregiver support groups are typically held at churches, community centers or senior living communities. To locate a group you can start by calling your local council on aging or Area Agency on Aging (AAA). Specifically for caregivers caring for an individual with a memory impairment diagnosis, the Alzheimer's Association's community resource finder can help you locate a caregiver group.

Taking time to care for yourself is essential in being able to appropriately care for someone else. Let a caregiver support group give you the extra boost of support as you continue in your role!



Interested in learning more about support available for caregivers through Age Assured?



Caregiver Skills Training



Access to Caregiver Support Groups



Call today to speak with one of our allies at **866-882-2559**

or



Visit www.assured.care/caregiving to sign up



EDITOR'S NOTE

We hope you enjoyed this edition of "The Upbeat". Feel free to share this newsletter with your friends, family and neighbors as well.

We welcome any feedback, comments, or questions you may have. Please reach out to us at newsletter@assuredallies.com. If you prefer to receive this newsletter in electronic format, contact us as well.