

Lessening the burden of care

■ **Question:** How can I make sure that my parents are safe in their own homes without sacrificing my own mental well-being?

■ **Answer:** Look for items that offer peace of mind and safety in the home, ask for help, and take advantage of community resources.

With longer life expectancies—81 years of age for women and 76 for men—older children are assuming the role of caregiver for their elderly parents.

But the toll of assuming the role of a caregiver goes beyond finances and time. In a national survey conducted by AARP in 2009, 21 percent of caregivers described their own health as “fair” or “poor.” And more than a third of caregivers report that providing personal care is emotionally stressful.

Demands of care

“As the population in the U.S. ages, the prevalence of chronic disease, disability and dependency will also



SUPPORTIVE CARE. With longer life expectancies, older children are assuming the role of caregiver for their elderly parents. PHOTO: PHILIPS LIFELINE

rise,” says Dr. Stephen Holland, chief medical officer of Univita Health.

Approximately 68 percent of seniors aged 65 or older will need supportive care during their lifetime for physical or cognitive limitations, Dr. Holland explains, ranging from bathing and dressing to managing medication, caring for their homes and arranging transportation.

More than three quarters of those seniors will receive that care from unpaid family members and friends.

Approximately 43 million Americans are caregivers, with one in three providing such care for more than five years.

Building independence

Caregivers step in to keep seniors at home, but safety becomes a major concern. Taking steps to improve their independence can help with the job.

Caring.com suggests measures like nonslip mats in the shower or bathtub and securing all electrical cords

to the wall. Keeping a phone in every room can be an added precaution.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, each year, one out of three adults aged 65 or older suffers a fall. Falls can result in bone fractures and long lasting disability and dependency, as well as potentially fatal injuries such as head trauma.

The CDC recommends regular exercise such as yoga to improve balance, eye exams and close monitoring of their medications and their related symptoms to prevent falls.

Health as a priority

Caregivers must remember to consider their own mental and physical wellbeing when taking on this role.

Womenshealth.gov recommends all caregivers, male or female, look for caregiver resources in their community, ask for help when needed, visit the doctor regularly and set aside personal time each week.

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