

HOME CARE

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Home Care Workers

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If your loved one lives at home—and you cannot be there to provide daily care—a skilled or semi-skilled home care worker may provide a solution. Here's a process for finding competent help and putting it to work:

- 1) Determine what kind of help is needed.
- 2) Choose the best path for you when seeking helpers.

Depending on your preference in step two, you might then explore:

- 3) Techniques for managing and hiring independently; or
- 4) Social or community services and their availability; or
- 5) How to evaluate a for-profit agency.

In all cases, however, you should be prepared to:

- 6) Get and give full disclosure.
- 7) Protect your interests and perform evaluations.

1) Determine what kind of help is needed.

How much assistance does your loved one need with medication, bathing, dressing, cooking, housekeeping, transportation, or other daily activities?

- 1 Discuss this topic with your loved one. Ask what kind of assistance he or she thinks would be most helpful, emphasizing the shared goal of maximized independence.
- 1 Hold a family meeting and consider the observations of other family members.
- 1 Your loved one's doctor should also be able to offer advice or make a recommendation.

Compare your loved one's requirements to the kind of care provided by the four categories of home care workers:

- 1 A housekeeper or chore worker performs basic household tasks and light cleaning.
- 1 A homemaker or personal care worker provides personal care, meal planning, household management, and medication reminders.
- 1 A companion or live-in provides personal care, light housework, exercise, companionship, and medication reminders.
- 1 A home health aide, certified nurse's assistant, or nurses' aide provides personal care, help with transfers, exercise, household services essential to health care, and medication assistance. Additional duties include reporting changes in your loved one's condition to an RN or therapist, and keeping medical records.

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2) Choose the best path for you when seeking helpers.

After you've decided on the type and degree of assistance, any number of factors—time, costs, your loved one's desire or ability to participate—will determine how you search for help.

Select from these approaches:

- | Managing or hiring independently. The “do-it-yourself” hiring process often begins with placing an ad in the newspaper (see **3** below).
- | Looking into social services and community agencies (see **4**).
- | Contacting a private, for-profit home health agency (see **5**).

3) Techniques for managing and hiring independently.

Before hiring a worker, find out whether the required assistance can be provided “in-house.” Sometimes, this can be as simple as asking another family member for help, or reorganizing responsibilities to fit different schedules.

Convene a family conference, and keep the following in mind:

- | Be prepared. Have a list ready when people say, “What can I do to help?”
- | Be specific: “I need someone to take Sarah to her doctor's appointment every Wednesday.”
- | Be positive: “It's a big help when someone else goes grocery shopping.”
- | Offer choices: “Could you pick up the prescriptions at the pharmacy tomorrow or stay here while I go?”
- | Out-of-town family members can help by managing bills or helping with household repairs when they visit.
- | Other people may find it easier to do yard work, home repairs, laundry, or meal preparation than to provide direct care. Let them. Anything that will lighten your load is important.

Even with family members doing all they can, it still might be necessary to hire someone to provide additional care. If so, there are several important points to consider:

- | Check local churches, synagogues, senior centers, Area Agencies on Aging, and colleges that offer nursing programs. There may be newsletters or bulletin boards where you can place an advertisement.

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- | Ask for identification and check references.
- | Be sure the worker has the necessary qualifications and/or training.
- | Ask to see training certificates, particularly if your loved one has special medical needs.
- | If your loved one needs to be transferred from a wheelchair, make certain the aide knows how to do this safely.
- | If the prospective aide does not know how to bathe a person in bed or perform safe transfers—but seems to be otherwise qualified—he or she can be trained.
- | If your loved one needs round-the-clock care, consider hiring live-in help. In exchange for room and board, these aides usually work for less than workers who come in for only a few hours.
- | Check with the insurance company about coverage for a full-time home care worker, and contact the appropriate agencies concerning social security taxes, unemployment insurance, and workmen's compensation.
- | If you don't want to deal with these complicated withholdings, accountants and companies that specialize in payrolls can perform these functions for you.
- | If public transportation isn't available and your loved one isn't eligible for free or low-cost transportation, hire someone who drives, since this can save you substantial amounts of money in ride fares. If the worker is going to drive your car, check with your insurance company concerning limitations on your policy.

4) Social or community services and their availability.

The following kinds of services are designed to help people live at home. Not all services are available in all communities, but chances are, there's something here to offer support for your loved one.

- | **Adult Day Care/Adult Day Health** includes social activities, health education, and supervision provided in facilities such as churches, nursing homes, and community centers. Some centers also provide transportation.
- | **Adult Protective Services** investigate possible abuse, neglect, exploitation, or abandonment and provide short-term emergency support services to adults in need of protection.
- | **Case Managers** can develop a complete plan of services based on your loved one's needs and ensure that necessary services are provided.

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- | **Chore and Homemaker Services** provide help such as yard work, household cleaning, grocery shopping, laundry, and meal preparation.
- | **Companion or Visitor** programs provide companionship for a period of time. They normally do not provide housekeeping or personal care.
- | **Congregate Meals** provide nutritionally balanced meals and recreational activities in a social atmosphere. Transportation may be offered as part of the service.
- | **Health Screening** (for persons 60 and older) is available in some communities for general health assessment, limited physical examinations, and some laboratory tests.
- | **Home Health** provided by nurses, therapists, or trained aides must be authorized by a physician and may include help with medications, exercises, wound care, or monitoring medical conditions.
- | **Hospice services** are available for terminally ill patients and their families and may include medical care, social services, and counseling.
- | **Medical Alert** programs use an electrical device to alert dispatchers and medical personnel if your loved one needs help.
- | **Mental Health Services** include evaluation, emergency, and outpatient treatment.
- | **Personal Care Services** include help with bathing, dressing, grooming, and household chores.
- | **Respite Care** provides periods of relief for family caregivers. Services can be arranged through adult family homes, adult residential care, social day care, and other local agencies.
- | **Home-delivered or Senior Meals** provide nutritious meals delivered to homebound persons.
- | **Telephone Reassurance** programs make regular calls to homebound persons. These programs can be especially reassuring to long-distance caregivers who can't be present to monitor a loved one's status.
- | **Transportation** may be available for medical and social services, meal programs, shopping, and recreational activities.

A good way to start is by contacting your local Home and Community Services Office, the Senior Information and Assistance Office, or your local Area Agency on Aging.

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5) How to evaluate a for-profit agency.

Some home health care agencies focus primarily on the medical aspects of care and provide trained personnel, such as nurses and physical therapists. Other agencies, however, may specialize in non-medical care only, so it's important to prepare an assessment of your loved one's needs before making contact.

When hiring help through an agency, find out:

- | How long the agency has been in business.
- | Which services are covered by Medicare.
- | What type of employee screening the agency performs.
- | Whether you or the agency will be responsible for paying the worker.
- | Whether you or the agency will be responsible for supervising workers.
- | What types of general and specialized training the workers have.
- | Whether the same person will care for your loved one each day.
- | Who to call if the worker fails to show up.
- | Whether a different worker can be requested and on what basis.
- | How the agency responds to an emergency need.
- | How the agency handles complaints.
- | What fees the agency charges for different types of care.
- | Whether the agency offers a sliding fee scale.
- | The minimum and maximum hours of service.
- | Limitations on tasks performed or times when services are furnished.
- | Whether the workers are agency employees or contractors on referral.
- | Whether the agency has malpractice insurance.

6) Get and give full disclosure.

Whether you are working through a company or hiring someone on your own, certain information and guidelines should be established up front. This can occur through face-to-face interviews with individual workers or when conferencing with the agency.

- | Have a full and complete discussion of your loved one's needs.
- | Get a full account of the applicant's experience and his or her expectations, or a comprehensive review of the agency's training requirements and certification standards.
- | Explain what you want done and how you would like it done, keeping in mind that the worker is there to care for your loved one and not the rest of the family.



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- | Be clear about the worker's salary, the pay period, and reimbursement for gas, groceries, and other expenses.
- | Discuss policies for vacations, holidays, absences, lateness, and termination.
- | Talk about your loved one's dietary restrictions. Provide a list of contacts in case of an emergency, review security precautions and keys, and discuss your loved one's medication requirements.
- | If the worker lives in the home, make sure that he or she has living quarters that give everyone the maximum amount of privacy possible.
- | If the worker has a car, discuss use of this car on the job, insurance coverage, or other travel arrangements.

7) Protect your interests and perform evaluations

Regular communication with your loved one will provide you with some of the information you'll need to evaluate a worker's performance. Does your loved one continue to be comfortable with the worker? Has anything changed in their relationship or in the care worker's attitude?

Once the home care worker is on the job, hold periodic meetings to discuss any problems and find ways to resolve them.

- | Keep a list of home care agencies, neighbors, or family members who can be called on short notice. You'll need alternatives if the worker is going to be late or absent.
- | Protect private papers and valuables. Check the phone bill, and credit card and bank statements for unauthorized use. Professional caregivers have access to a variety of sensitive materials, so it's best to keep an eye on your loved one's finances.
- | Make arrangements to pick up the mail yourself.



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www.CaregiversLibrary.org

- Browse our library containing over 2,500 pages of articles on all aspects of family caregiving, and congregational and organizational Caregiving Ministries.

Adapting the Home

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Home adaptation is about helping your loved one remain as independent as possible. Preventing falls, burns, and other injuries can be as simple as moving electrical cords, plugging in a few nightlights, or buying some special equipment. But home adaptation can also involve larger structural changes—or even a move to a more suitable home or neighborhood.

Use the following steps to plan and execute necessary home modifications:

- 1) Assess general safety and discuss potential changes
- 2) Do preventative maintenance
- 3) Determine your approach to larger modifications
- 4) Look into community programs
- 5) Evaluate private contractors
- 6) Make a payment plan

1) Assess general safety and discuss potential changes.

Use the **Home Safety Checklist** at the end of this section to perform an assessment. (Additional checklists are available on **www.National Caregivers Library.org**) No matter what changes you think are appropriate, discuss the situation with your loved one.

- | Visit **www.CaregiversLibrary.org** for tips on how to approach sensitive issues. Talking with a loved one about matters that could affect his or her independence can be difficult.
- | Be mindful of your loved one's dignity. It may be embarrassing for him or her to admit certain frailties or other problems.
- | Make small changes first, and work incrementally. Few things can be more disconcerting than returning from the hospital to find that everything's been rearranged.

2) Do preventative maintenance.

In many cases, a few minor changes may be enough to give you and your loved one peace of mind. Conducting a "walk around" is a good way to identify and address simple safety problems.

- | Keep emergency numbers by the phone. Use large, easy to read printing.
- | Remove clutter from halls and stairs.
- | Make sure all throw rugs are securely held down.
- | Keep floors dry and in good repair.
- | Use nightlights or reflective tape in bedrooms, bathrooms, and hallways.
- | Use non-slip mats in the tub or shower.
- | Install grab bars where necessary.
- | Secure sinks and towel racks, which can easily be pulled off walls.

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- | Keep the bathroom floor dry.
- | Lower the water temperature to 120 degrees.
- | Purchase a “grabber” tool for hard-to-reach items in the kitchen.
- | Carry out any routine maintenance that has been neglected over the years.
- | Make modifications as attractive and unobtrusive as possible. This will help your loved one feel more comfortable while preserving the home’s resale value.

3) Determine your approach to larger modifications.

While some modifications are surprisingly inexpensive and easy, others—like building ramps for wheelchair access, or lowering sinks and counter tops—may be more costly.

There are three ways of tackling larger modifications:

- | Do it yourself, or with the aid of family and friends.
- | Contact a home modification or repair program (see **Step 4** below).
- | Hire a handyman or contractor (see **Step 5** below).

4) Look into community programs.

There are a number of home modification and repair programs that might be able to offer support. These programs are offered through many different agencies and organizations, including:

- | Local Area Agency On Aging
- | State Agency On Aging
- | State Housing Finance Agency
- | Department of Public Welfare
- | Department Of Community Development
- | Senior Center or Independent Living Center

5) Evaluate private contractors.

If you decide to hire a private contractor, make certain that he or she is reliable. Be especially wary of door-to-door repair salespeople, and check out the contractor’s background before signing any paperwork.

- | Get recommendations from friends or relatives.
- | Make sure that the contractor is licensed and bonded.
- | Try to get bids from several contractors.
- | Ask for and check references from previous customers.



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- | Ask to see some of the contractor's completed projects.
- | Contact the local Better Business Bureau or Consumer Affairs Office regarding the contractor's performance record.
- | Insist on a written agreement, with only a small down payment. Have the agreement reviewed by a lawyer if it is complicated.
- | Make the final payment only after the project is completed.

6) Make a payment plan.

If your loved one's home requires safety or accessibility modifications, consider these forms of financial assistance:

- | **HUD Property Improvement or Rehabilitation Loans.** Contact your local housing and community development office to find out what loans might be available.
- | **Farmers Home Administration (FHA).** Provides various grants and loans to rural, low-income elders.
- | **Local Community Development Department.** Many cities and towns use Local Community Development Block Grants to help citizens maintain and upgrade their homes.
- | **Local Area Agency on Aging.** Ask about funds from the Older Americans Act Title III, which may be used to modify and repair homes.
- | **Welfare or Energy Department.** The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) provide funds to weatherize the homes of lower-income persons.
- | **Local Bank or Lenders.** Some banks offer Home Equity Conversion Mortgages (HECM), a reverse mortgage allowing homeowners to turn their home's value into cash without having to move or make regular loan payments.



Home Safety Checklist

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Use this checklist as a starting point for conducting your own safety "walk-through." The questions are designed to help you isolate current problems and recognize potential hazards.

Throughout the home:	YES	NO
Is the lighting sufficient?	o	o
Are lamp, extension and telephone cords placed out of flow of traffic?	o	o
Are cords out from beneath furniture and rugs and carpeting?	o	o
Are any outlets overloaded?	o	o
Are all small rugs and runners slip resistant?	o	o
Are there smoke detectors on every floor?	o	o
Are important numbers posted?	o	o
Is there an emergency plan?	o	o
Would your loved one benefit from an in-home or personal alert system?	o	o
Are light switches located near the entrance of each room?	o	o
In the kitchen:	YES	NO
Are towels, curtains, and other flammables kept away from the range?	o	o
Are appliance cords located away from the sink or range?	o	o
Is there good, even lighting over the stove, sink, and countertop areas, especially where food is sliced and cut?	o	o
Are dishes, pots, and pans evenly stacked?	o	o
In the bedroom:	YES	NO
Are lamps or light switches within reach of the bed?	o	o
Is there a phone within reach of the bed?	o	o



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Are there loose rugs or runners in the areas around the bed?

Are phone and lamp cords tucked in a safe place?

Would your loved one benefit from nightlights?

In the bathroom: YES NO

Are bathtubs and showers equipped with non-skid mats, abrasive strips, or non-slick surfaces?

Do bathtubs and showers have grab bars? Is a tub bench needed?

Is the water temperature 120 degrees or lower?

In stairways and hallways: YES NO

Are light switches located at the top and bottom of stairs?

Are exits and passageways kept clear?

Is carpeting fixed?

Are steps even and of equal height?

Do steps allow secure footing?