

Family Caregiver Checklist

A Practical Guide for Families Caring for an Aging Loved One

Caring for a parent, spouse, or loved one can be rewarding, but it can also become overwhelming as needs change over time. This checklist is designed to help families identify potential concerns, recognize when additional support may be beneficial, and ensure their loved one remains safe, healthy, and comfortable at home.

Safety at Home

Falls remain one of the leading causes of injury among older adults. Small changes throughout the home can significantly reduce risk.

- Remove loose rugs, cords, clutter, and other tripping hazards
- Install grab bars near toilets, showers, and tubs
- Use non-slip mats in bathrooms
- Ensure stairways have secure handrails on both sides
- Improve lighting in hallways, bedrooms, entryways, and stairwells
- Add nightlights between the bedroom and bathroom
- Test smoke and carbon monoxide detectors monthly
- Keep emergency contact information easily accessible
- Ensure frequently used items can be reached without climbing or stretching
- Review the home periodically for new safety concerns

Medication Management

Medication errors are one of the most common reasons older adults experience health complications and hospitalizations.

- Maintain an updated list of medications, dosages, and prescribing physicians
- Use a pill organizer or medication dispenser
- Set medication reminders or alarms
- Confirm prescriptions are refilled before they run out
- Monitor for side effects after medication changes
- Bring an updated medication list to medical appointments
- Watch for missed doses or accidental double dosing
- Ensure medications are stored properly

Daily Living & Personal Care

Changes in personal care often happen gradually and can be easy for families to overlook.

- Regular bathing and grooming are maintained
- Clothing is clean, weather-appropriate, and changed regularly
- Oral hygiene is being performed consistently
- Meals are prepared and eaten regularly
- Adequate hydration is maintained throughout the day
- Weight remains stable
- Sleep patterns have not significantly changed
- Mobility around the home remains safe
- Toileting needs are being managed comfortably

Memory & Cognitive Changes

Early signs of memory decline often appear in daily routines before they become obvious.

- Repeated questions or conversations
- Difficulty remembering appointments
- Missed medications
- Confusion about dates, times, or locations
- Increased difficulty following conversations
- Forgetting familiar names or places
- Difficulty managing finances or bills
- Misplacing important items frequently
- Increased anxiety or frustration related to memory
- Wandering or becoming disoriented

Warning Signs Families Often Miss

Many families overlook subtle changes because they happen gradually.

- Wearing the same clothes repeatedly
- Burnt cookware or forgotten meals
- Unopened mail accumulating
- Expired food in the refrigerator
- Unexplained bruises
- Increased isolation from family or friends
- Missed birthdays, appointments, or important events
- Difficulty operating familiar appliances
- Increased confusion during evenings (sundowning)
- New reluctance to leave the home

Household & Financial Management

A decline in household management often signals that additional support may be beneficial.

- Mail is being opened and reviewed
- Bills are paid on time
- The home remains clean and organized
- Laundry is completed regularly
- Groceries are stocked appropriately
- Food has not expired
- Signs of scams or unusual spending are monitored
- Important paperwork remains organized

Driving & Transportation

Transportation concerns often emerge before families are ready to discuss them.

- Driving remains safe and confident
- No recent accidents, near misses, or vehicle damage
- Appointments are attended consistently
- Groceries and prescriptions can be obtained reliably
- Alternative transportation options have been identified if needed

Social & Emotional Well-Being

Isolation can impact both physical and mental health.

- Regular contact with family and friends
- Participation in hobbies or meaningful activities
- Continued involvement in faith, community, or social groups
- Signs of depression or loneliness are monitored
- Opportunities for companionship exist beyond task-based care
- Daily interactions remain meaningful and engaging

Medical & Care Coordination

Healthcare needs often become more complex over time.

- Current physician and specialist list is maintained
- Insurance information is readily available
- Advance directives and healthcare wishes are documented
- Follow-up appointments are scheduled and attended
- Someone can accompany your loved one when necessary
- Emergency plans are understood by family members

Hospital Discharge & Recovery Checklist

The first few weeks after hospitalization often require additional support.

- Follow-up appointments are scheduled
- Medication changes are understood
- Fall risks have been addressed
- Transportation is arranged
- Meals and hydration are planned
- Assistance is available during recovery
- Home environment supports healing and safety
- Warning signs requiring medical attention are understood

Caregiver Self-Care

Family caregivers often focus entirely on their loved one and neglect their own well-being.

- Take regular breaks
- Accept help from family and friends
- Share caregiving responsibilities
- Schedule personal medical appointments
- Maintain healthy sleep habits
- Participate in activities you enjoy
- Consider respite care when needed
- Reach out to support groups or trusted friends

Quick Family Assessment

Can your loved one safely:

- Prepare meals?
- Manage medications?
- Bathe independently?
- Get to appointments?
- Move safely throughout the home?
- Respond appropriately during an emergency?

If multiple boxes are unchecked, additional support may be beneficial.

When It May Be Time to Ask for Help

Consider professional support if:

- Your loved one is no longer safe alone for extended periods
- Medications are being missed or taken incorrectly
- Meals, hygiene, or housekeeping are declining
- Falls or near falls are becoming more frequent
- A recent hospitalization has changed care needs
- Family caregivers feel exhausted, overwhelmed, or isolated
- Family tension is increasing around caregiving responsibilities
- You find yourself worrying constantly about your loved one's safety

This checklist is intended as an educational resource to help families identify potential care needs, improve safety, and support aging loved ones at home.