

Virtual Caregiving

Being a caregiver when you can't physically attend to — or even visit — the person you're caring for presents a special set of challenges. These tips, ideas and technologies can help.

Morning and Evening Check-ins

Many caregivers find peace of mind in scheduling morning and evening check-ins with their loved one. You might, for example, set up a text-message thread among a few family members. Ask your loved one to text the group each morning when he or she wakes up and again at bedtime. Some families are using text messaging or email to send uplifting notes and funny videos, or setting up weekly calls.

Wearable Technology

Caregivers today can benefit from a number of technologies that can check on and safeguard their loved ones in real time.

- **Smart watches**, while often costly, can offer peace-of-mind features such as fall detection, heart rate monitoring and ECG tracking. You can even set alarms to remind your loved one to take medications. Smart watches are best suited for care recipients who are comfortable with technology and experienced with other smart devices, such as phones and tablets.
- **Emergency Response Devices (ERDs)** are another option worth exploring. These devices are typically worn around the neck or wrist. They have a medical alert button that can be pressed to contact first responders in the case of an emergency, such as a fall or when experiencing heart pain. More expensive models also offer automatic fall detection and two-way talk features with live agents 24/7. Be sure to factor in monthly subscription fees when exploring options.

“Face-to-Face” Conversations with Video Chats

Video chat technologies make it possible to interact visually. This can be a huge plus for caregivers. They can keep tabs on how their loved one is looking and note any physical changes (weight loss or an unkempt appearance, for example) that might be a call for concern. One popular service, **Zoom.us**, is free for meetings that last 40 minutes or less. You can also explore smart phone apps that let you chat “face to face” at no cost.

Ask About Telehealth Options

Telehealth provides access to health care providers from the comfort of your family member or friend's own home, allowing faster support and reduced exposure to the virus. To learn more about telehealth options available to those you care for, call the number on the back of their member ID card.

Virtual Support Groups

Being a caregiver can at times feel lonely under normal circumstances. So it's not surprising that some caregivers are feeling even more isolated given the restrictions in place with COVID-19. Taking care of yourself at this time is important. The U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services reports that caregivers are more likely to have long-term health problems including arthritis, diabetes or depression.

If you've never explored online support groups before, now is the time to give them a try. Plug "online caregiver support groups" into a web browser. Some support groups are highly organized with moderators and specific times for video chats and online discussions. Others are simple message boards where members can post their concerns and offer insights and support to others. You may prefer a generalized support group or one that's specific to diseases and conditions such as Alzheimer's and dementia.

Staying Stimulated

Not being able to enjoy the company of family members and friends can be difficult for anyone, so it's important to stay stimulated. Encourage your loved one to maintain mental sharpness by engaging in brain games and mind teasers. If your loved one has a smart phone or tablet, there are many apps where you can play games with or against each other. For example, you both can tackle a crossword puzzle by taking turns solving clues, or you can compete against each other in a word find. Search for terms such as "mobile brain games" in your phone's app store.

Voice-Command Devices

Voice-command devices are a handy addition to the home for many people, but particularly for those who have mobility issues. These devices can help your care recipient make phone calls, get local news updates, play relaxing music, get weather forecasts and so much more — all by simply uttering a voice command. Many smart phones offer voice command features. Or you can buy compact smart speakers that answer to voice commands and perform a broad range of activities, including fun audio-only brain games.

UnitedHealthcare is committed to making sure you have the information and resources you need to stay safe and healthy. To learn more about what's available to you, call the number on the back of the member's ID card. Additionally, you can reach out to a mental health professional by calling the UnitedHealthcare Help Line at **866-342-6892, TTY 711**, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Sources:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Get Support if You Are a Caregiver
<https://health.gov/myhealthfinder/topics/everyday-healthy-living/mental-health-and-relationships/get-support-if-you#panel-2>

Zoom

<https://zoom.us/>

Plans are insured through UnitedHealthcare Insurance Company or one of its affiliated companies, a Medicare Advantage organization with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in the plan depends on the plan's contract renewal with Medicare. This article is for your information and convenience only and does not replace the care or advice of a doctor. Always talk to your doctor before beginning any exercise program, therapy, or medication. The health information provided in this guide is general in nature and is not medical advice or a substitute for professional health care. UnitedHealthcare does not guarantee the accuracy or completeness of the information, and does not recommend or endorse the products which are referenced in the guide.

©2020 United HealthCare Services, Inc.