

3 Tips for Long-distance Caregivers

Long-distance caregiving can still make a difference; find out how with these three helpful tips.

You want to provide care to a friend or family member — the only problem is that you live hours away from one another. Can you still help? Absolutely! Here are three tips when you're trying to care for someone from afar.

1. Get Organized

Getting organized should be one of your first priorities when it comes to long-distance caregiving. Get as much information as you can on the following:

-  Current medications.
-  Medical paperwork.
-  Insurance information.
-  Names and contact information for the medical team of the person you're caring for.

Also make sure you or another caregiver has permission to get medical and financial updates from doctors or insurance agents.

It may be helpful to keep all important information together in one place. Be sure you can access it on the go so you can respond to things in real time. One more tip: If you're sharing caregiving responsibilities with a few people, you can create a secure online folder. Keep information and copies of paperwork in it so that all of you can access it when necessary. You can check out our Care Organizer on [uhc.com/caregiving](https://www.uhc.com/caregiving) as a starting place to record household, medical, and financial information in one place.

2. Keep in Contact

If you're the primary caregiver, talk to the person you're caring for regularly. Some find it helpful to have a brief phone call every morning — that way they know that their friend or family member made it safely through the night and is ready to take on the day. Keep a log of your chats. For example, if your loved one mentioned having a headache yesterday, make a note so you remember to bring it up again. And be sure to ask specific questions to get helpful information: How's your energy today? What do you plan on making yourself for lunch? What do you plan on doing today?

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3. Determine the Best Way to Help

If you're playing a supporting role in caregiving, ask the primary caregiver how you can help. You might ask, for example, "Would it be helpful if I ordered some new pajamas for Mom online?" or "I have a block of time carved out tomorrow to help navigate Uncle Dan's insurance billing. Is that still the best way for me to help, or is there something else you'd like me to work on?"

Still not sure how you can make a difference as a long-distance caregiver?

There are many ways you can support a primary caregiver's role. Here are some specific ways to help:

- ✓ Offer to be the "information coordinator." In other words, the point person for organizing paperwork and medical information.
- ✓ Research in-home care options or ways to relieve the primary caregiver. You might consider paying for a meal delivery or cleaning service.
- ✓ Be the point person for finances and money management.
- ✓ Help the primary caregiver look into retirement communities or assisted living facilities if needed.
- ✓ Help communicate with other family member or friends by sharing email updates or creating an online account on **CaringBridge**.

Share Your Gratitude

If someone else is taking on most of the caregiving work, one of the best things you can do is make sure that person feels valued. Burnout is common, even amongst the most committed caregivers. Drop personal notes of gratitude in the mail. Send a thoughtful gift. Simply acknowledge what they're doing. Even a small gesture or comment can go a long way.

And if your loved one is in an assisted living facility or something similar, all of the above still hold true — frequently share your gratitude with the team looking after your friend and family member. Your note of appreciation might be the only show of support that they receive all week!

Caring for a family member or friend from afar may not be easy, but there are plenty of ways to connect and offer support and help from a distance. Stay organized and show your gratitude frequently for anyone else who is helping out.

Sources:

National Institute on Aging: 8 tips for long distance caregiving

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/8-tips-long-distance-caregiving>

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