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Recognizing the Need for outside Help in Caregiving

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Caregivers often don't recognize when they are in over their heads, and often get to a breaking point. After a prolonged period of time, caregiving can become too difficult to endure any longer. Short-term the caregiver can handle it. Long-term, help is needed. Outside help at this point is needed.

A typical pattern with an overloaded caregiver may unfold as follows:

- 1 to 18 months - the caregiver is confident, has everything under control and is coping well. Other friends and family are lending support.
- 20 to 36 months - the caregiver may be taking medication to sleep and control mood swings. Outside help dwindles away and except for trips to the store or doctor, the caregiver has severed most social contacts. The caregiver feels alone and helpless.
- 38 to 50 months - Besides needing tranquilizers or antidepressants, the caregiver's physical health is beginning to deteriorate. Lack of focus and sheer fatigue cloud judgment and the caregiver is often unable to make rational decisions or ask for help.

It is often at this stage that family or friends intercede and find other solutions for care. This may include respite care, hiring home health aides or putting the disabled loved one in a facility. Without intervention, the caregiver may become a candidate for long term care as well.

With the holiday season upon us, caregivers feel even more stress -- with planning, shopping and participating in holiday activities. This is a perfect time for family and friends to step up and provide some respite time and caregiving help. Whether it is provided personally or arranged as a gift of services to be provided by a professional respite company or home care provider, it is a welcome gift.

An article in "[Today's Caregiver](#)" states:

"Nearly one in four caregivers of people with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias provide 40 hours a week or more of care. Seventy-one percent sustain this commitment for more than a year, and 32 percent do so for five years or more. One of the best gifts you can give someone caring for Alzheimer's is something that relieves the stress or provides a bit of respite for the caregiver.

The Gift of time: Cost-effective and truly meaningful gifts are self-made coupons for

cleaning the house, preparing a meal, moving lawn/shoveling driveway, respite times that allow the caregiver time off to focus on what he/she needs.”

It is also important to note that hiring professional care provider services can provide valuable ongoing support to an overloaded caregiver. A [financial planner](#), care funding specialist or a [reverse mortgage specialist](#) may find the funds to pay for professional help to keep a loved one at home. A [care manager](#) can guide the family and the caregiver through the maze of long term care issues. The care manager has been there many times -- the family is experiencing it for the first time.

An [elder law attorney](#) can help iron out legal problems. And an [elder mediator](#) can help solve disputes between family members. There are also cash benefits for [Veterans](#), who served during a period of war, that pay for home care or assisted living.

If you are the one providing daily care for a loved one, you owe it to yourself to seek help. Take care of yourself and your needs, both physically and mentally. Seek out professional help that will ease your burden and look for community service organizations that offer respite help.

The National Care Planning Council’s website www.longtermcarelink.net contains hundreds of articles with tips and advice for caregivers and their families. Take a few minutes to find the help you need and enjoy this holiday season.