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Balancing Work and Caregiving

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According to the Administration on Aging, approximately two-thirds of all family caregivers also work outside the home. If you're currently caring for a loved one, chances are you often feel overwhelmed by the difficulty of balancing your responsibilities to your loved ones, your home, and your job. You're not alone. Read the tips below to learn how to ease the burden.

Research employer policies and programs. Many companies are starting to recognize the unique needs of caregivers. Talk with your human resources department and look through your employee manual to determine whether your company has policies in place or benefits available to help you manage your roles. Examples may include the following:

- **The Family and Medical Leave Act** entitles eligible employees to take 12 weeks per year of unpaid leave to care for a family member. Taking this leave would not impact your health insurance coverage or job security.
- **Employee assistance programs** help employees deal with problems that might affect their work. Often, these programs include short-term counseling and referrals to services in the community.
- **Flex time** is a flexible work schedule. You're probably familiar with the standard 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. workday. If your company allows flex time, your employee handbook will usually define a core period of time during which you must be at work (e.g., from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.). You then create your schedule around these hours. For example, you may choose to work from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., or from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- **Telecommuting** allows you to work from another location, such as home, for a set number of hours or days each week.
- **Job sharing** is when two people are hired on a part-time or reduced-time basis to complete a job normally held by one person.

Talk to your supervisor. Take some time to think about your company's policies and what changes would help you better manage your responsibilities. Draft a proposal, then schedule a meeting with your supervisor to talk it over. If possible, try to schedule this meeting with your supervisor before your responsibilities at home create a crisis at work.

During the meeting, be honest about your situation and open to any ideas your supervisor may have. Be sure to communicate how the changes you've proposed will benefit your employer (for example, maybe you'll be less distracted and better able to focus on your work, or maybe you'll take on an unpopular task in return). Offer a trial run of your proposed changes with a follow-up meeting in a few

weeks or months.

Be an activist. It's possible that your company or supervisor might not be able to accommodate your requests. If that's the case, try not to be upset. Instead, set an example. Work with human resources to help your company's leaders understand caregivers' needs. Keep the channels of communication open, and try again after some time has passed.

Schedule your tasks. Make a schedule with your family members. This will help all of you stay organized and will help you manage the demands on your time. Include all activities, appointments, and regularly scheduled tasks, such as bill payments. Don't forget to also schedule time for things you enjoy, such as visiting with friends or going out to dinner or a movie.

Use to-do lists daily to prioritize your time. For example, you might create one list for tasks that you need to complete at home and another for tasks that you need to complete at work. Tackle the most important tasks first.

Ask for help. Plan for times when you need help by making a list of people who are willing to lend a hand. This list might include family members, friends, and temporary care workers. On your list, include phone numbers, the times people are available and the tasks they feel most comfortable doing. Keep a copy of the list with you at all times in case you're away from home when you need to ask someone for help.

Also, look for help in your community. Community services can include meal delivery, transportation, legal or financial counseling, and home health care services such as physical therapy or nursing. You can also ask at your church or synagogue for services or volunteers who can help you.

Take care of yourself. You may feel like you have to "do it all," regardless of the toll it takes on you. However, you can't take care of others if you don't take care of yourself. Read "[Caregiver Health and Wellness](#)" and "[Caregiver Stress](#)" to learn how to make your physical and emotional well-being a priority.

Bibliography

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