

1. **Assemble contact list and keep numbers handy** – neighbors, friends, relatives and those who have offered to lend a hand, clergy, health care providers (doctors and their “go-to” people, pharmacist, others involved in loved one’s care), insurance company, and community resources you use.
2. **Keep health records handy and up to date** – Accompany loved one on their doctor visit, obtain current medication list at each appointment (drug name, dosage, frequency, and what it is for), and keep notes of instructions, changes related to health status.
3. **Build a support network & don’t be afraid to ask for help** – In most families, one person assumes the role of primary caregiver. But that doesn’t let others off the hook. Don’t be shy about letting others pitch in. Enlist the help of other family members, distant relatives, friends, neighbors. Not all of folks will volunteer to help, but many will get involved if you ask. Make up a schedule or consider using an online tool such as www.LotsaHelpingHands to organize and keep track of who’s doing what, when.
4. **Research helpful services and know where to find help locally** – many disease-specific groups and faith based organizations provide support services to caregivers. Consider home care, adult day center, home delivered meals, and help with everyday activities such as cleaning and laundry, yard chores, transportation, grocery shopping, friendly visiting, caregiver respite. Contact the White Bear Area Senior Program at 653-3121 www.whitebearareaseniorprogram or Senior Linkage Line 1-800-333-2434.
5. **Determine housing options and preferences** – Discuss staying in home with additional help or moving to assisted living residence or continuing care retirement community.
6. **Create a financial profile and list of important accounts** – list of income sources (with numbers) such as Social Security and pensions, monthly and yearly income and expenses, bank accounts, credit cards, investments, a statement of net worth, and health and life insurance policies.
7. **Study your loved one’s insurance coverage** – it’s important to know exactly what your loved one’s health insurance covers (and long term care insurance if they have it), so read the policy carefully or call your insurer’s customer service number to ask questions. If Medicare is the main provider, call 800-Medicare or go to www.Medicare.gov.

8. **Review legal needs** – what do you have, where is it located, is it up to date, expressing current wishes, what is still needed (wills, advance directives such as living wills, health care proxy forms, trusts, powers of attorney).
9. **Forgive yourself** – Do the best you can but recognize that no one is perfect.
10. **Trust your gut** – Don't rely solely on doctors to recognize symptoms, bring your concerns to the appropriate provider and advocate for the best care and treatment possible. Let your loved one's physician know what care you are providing and when you need help.
11. **Appreciate the little things** – In the midst of constant illness, try to focus on the pleasure of small things, sitting around a table having a cup of tea, having dinner with children or grandchildren, nieces or nephews. These moments are a great source of comfort when the going gets rough.
12. **Take care of yourself first** – Make your own health and sanity a top priority. Just like on an airplane where the attendants tell you to put on your oxygen mask first so you can help others. If you don't, you put your loved one's well being in jeopardy along with your own.
13. **Set limits** – Decide just how much you are willing to do and what you won't be able to do. Be honest and realistic. Talk with your loved one candidly and explain that it is best to make plans now, putting a variety of supports in place so you don't burn out before them.
14. **Seek support** – Get some respite from caregiving. Consider a volunteer to come in and provide companionship or the adult day program for your loved one to enjoy while you take a break. Caregiver support groups are very helpful as those in similar situations can offer advice and support to one another. Consider individual counseling when the going gets tough. Sharing your feelings with a trained professional and getting feedback is a great way to cope.
15. **Keep a sense of humor** – We usually don't choose to be caregivers but stumble along as best we can to help those we love.