

According to the 2020 Census, 1 in 6 people in the United States were 65 years of age or older. For perspective, in 1920 this proportion was less than 1 in 20. Meigs county census numbers also reflect an aging population. With an aging population comes additional concerns to provide adequate care for loved ones. Being a family caregiver can be both rewarding and challenging. Here are some tips to help family caregivers navigate their responsibilities.

Take care of yourself. As the primary care provider, one must be able to handle the challenges and stress that accompany the role of a family caregiver. Ensure a proper sleep cycle, eat regularly and schedule breaks to recharge. A common issue with family caregivers is burnout. Taking appropriate steps to prevent burnout is a must. This includes delegating responsibilities to other family members or friends. Share caregiving responsibilities to prevent overwhelming yourself. Communicate openly about division of tasks. Remaining flexible will also help handling the stress of being a caregiver. Be prepared for unexpected changes in the care plan. Adapt to new care plans with a positive mindset. Seek assistance when adjustments are needed. Lastly, celebrate all wins, not matter how small. Focus on the positive aspects of caregiving and give yourself credit for the hard work you are doing.

Educate yourself. Learn as much as possible about the medical conditions of the person you are caring for. Attend doctor visits and have a list of prepared questions. Maintain a record of medical information, appointments, and medications. Keep important contacts readily available. There are even technology tools, such as caregiving apps, you can use to stay organized. Being organized and educated on what to do can allow you to provide the best care possible.

In addition to providing direct care, you need to be abreast on the financial planning and legal considerations of caregiving. This includes understanding the financial aspects of caregiving. Explore available benefits and financial assistance programs. Consider consulting with a financial advisor for long-term planning. Additionally, ensure that legal documents are in place, such as power of attorney and advanced care directives. Fully understand the patient's wishes regarding medical care and seek legal advice if necessary.

Being a family caregiver is a significant commitment. One must set realistic expectations. Accept that you cannot do everything, and that's okay. Prioritize tasks and focus on the most important. Be realistic about the patient's condition and your capacity. Keep open lines of communication with the person you are caring for and other family members. Communicate your personal needs and feelings to your support network. Seek additional support when able. You can connect with other caregivers for emotional support. For a comprehensive list of resources in the Meigs county area, review the "Quick Resource Guide" on our website <https://meigs-health.com/general-resources/> or call the Meigs County Health Department at 740-992-6626.

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