



HOME HEALTH HUBS DISEASES & CONDITIONS TESTS & PROCEDURES DRUG GUIDE

[Home](#) [Information](#) Caregiving: Sibling Conflicts When Caring For An Aging Parent

Caring for an Aging Parent: Let the Arguments Begin

Caring for a parent with failing health is a job that few people are prepared for. Sometimes, the hardest part is trying to work together with your siblings.

By Eve Glicksman, Staff Writer, myOptumHealth

Share [What is this?](#) Twitter Digg Facebook [More...](#) EMAIL PRINT RSS



Tempers were rising as their father's health continued to decline. Pat was burned out from doing most of the [caregiving](#). Jake thought Dad would be better served by professionals in an assisted living setting. Jen was angry at both of her siblings for making decisions about her dad's care without asking her.

Caring for a parent who is in failing health requires all hands on deck. It's a job that few are prepared for and comes with no instructions. Adult children may be forced to negotiate difficult choices about medical treatments, living arrangements or inheritance money that could rock the whole family.

Signs of the parent's mortality only up the ante for adult children who may still be vying for another chance to win parental love or approval. [Sibling rivalries](#) and old scores may reignite. And all these tensions may get played out in battles about the parent's care.

Family patterns

It's rare in any family that caregiving duties are shared equally. Siblings who live closest to the parent or don't work full-time may end up with the lion's share of it. Some sibs may help only when it's convenient for them. Those who have had a troubled history with the parent may offer no support.

Related Articles

[14 Signs That an Aging Parent May Need Your Help](#)

[Caregivers: Are You Stressed?](#)

[Assisted Living: Helping a Loved One Move On](#)

EMAIL PRINT RSS

Siblings tend to follow traditional gender roles when it comes to caregiving, studies show. Daughters typically do 70 percent to 80 percent of the hands-on work. Sons are more likely to help with money.

One small study shows that few families actually discuss how the tasks should be divided. The pattern is that one sibling - usually a daughter - simply assumes the role of primary caregiver.

All this feeds into the number one conflict repeatedly reported by siblings caring for an [aging](#) parent: the unequal division of labor.

Divvying up the work

You can prevent bickering among siblings by making sure no one feels either unfairly burdened or left out.

Try these strategies:

- At a family meeting, assign tasks based on each person's abilities and schedule. Everyone should pitch in, whether it's grocery shopping, paying for a housekeeper or interviewing home care agencies. Out-of-town siblings can still talk to doctors or lawyers, pay bills online or keep in touch with the parent through phone calls. Make sure each sibling is clear about what is expected of him or her.
- Siblings who are doing less should support those doing more. This includes being there for them to vent at stressful times. Likewise, primary caregivers should acknowledge other siblings' contributions and not exclude them from helping in some way.
- Is your sister taking family leave to care for your parent? Consider making a contract and compensating a sibling who is making financial sacrifices to be a caregiver. This money can come out of the parent's income or collectively from siblings.
- Seek outside help. If the work becomes too much to handle, hire outside caregiving help instead of fighting about it.

Preserving the peace

Infighting will create more pressure and hamper your ability to provide the best care for a parent. Here are some tips for heading off conflicts:

Respect the wishes of the parent. Sibling squabbles are less likely to erupt if a parent speaks up. Encourage parents to prepare an [advance directive](#) that details who is to make decisions about health care, finances and legal matters if the parent becomes unable to do so. If it is too late for that, look to the parent's values for guidance in resolving differences.

Have regular family meetings. All siblings should be present, if only on the phone. Suspicion or resentment can brew if anyone feels left out. Each sibling should run down caregiving tasks he or she performed, including how any money was spent. Include updates about the parent's condition and any new issues that need to be addressed.

Don't be a backseat driver. Criticizing or second-guessing the primary caregiver is bound to rankle if you aren't there to really know the situation. You all want the best for your parent. Try to discuss differences without putting anyone on the defensive.

Seek out a family mediator or counselor if you're at an impasse. A geriatric [social worker](#) or skilled family mediator can help families work through difficult decisions from an unbiased perspective.

Share
[What is this?](#)

Twitter

Digg

Facebook [More...](#)

EMAIL

PRINT

RSS

Updated on **07/04/2010**

SOURCES:

- Jennifer Willyard J, Miller K, Shoemaker M, Addison P. Making sense of sibling responsibility for family caregiving. Qualitative Health Research. 2008;18(12):1673-1686
- American Society of Clinical Oncology. Sharing responsibilities. **Accessed:** 06/23/2010
- U.S. Agency on Aging. Resolving conflicts related to family caregiving. **Accessed:** 06/23/2010
- Family Caregiver Alliance. Caregiving and sibling relationships: challenges and opportunities. **Accessed:** 06/23/2010
- University of Minnesota Extension. Adult sibling relationships. **Accessed:** 06/23/2010

Copyright © 2011 myOptumHealth.

Shortcuts

Health Information & News

- Diseases & Conditions
- Drug Guide
- Health News
- Newsletters
- Tests & Procedures
- Health Videos
- Shop

Manage My Health

- Calculators & Tools
- Find a Doctor
- Personal Health Record
- Symptom Checker

Health Hubs

- Complementary & Alternative Medicine
- Cancer
- Children's Health
- Colds & Flu
- Diabetes
- First Aid & Safety
- Fitness

- Healthy Pregnancy
- Healthy Weight, Health Kids
- Heart Health
- Men's Health
- Mental Health, Stress & Grief
- Nutrition
- Pain Management

[Help](#) | [About Us](#) | [Advertise With Us](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Feedback](#) | [Advisory Board](#) | [Learn About NowClinic](#)

© 2011 OptumHealth, Inc. | [Terms and Conditions](#) | [Privacy and Security Policy](#) | [Advertising and Editorial Policy](#)

myOptumHealth.com does not provide medical advice, diagnosis or treatment recommendations. It is not a substitute for your doctor or other health care professional's care. The material on this site is for informational purposes only.

