

Health and Wellness

News You Can Use

April 2018

How to balance your caregiving duties with your own health and career



Over one in eight Americans aged 40 to 60 are raising a child while caring for a parent, according to the Pew Research Center, and the stress of being in this “sandwich generation” can significantly impact your career as well as your overall physical and mental health. The National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP says that 70% of working caregivers suffer work-related difficulties due to their dual roles.

Caregiving challenges

Caregiving often ends up becoming a physical, mental and financial burden for the caregiver. The demands of both caregiving and a part-time or full-time job can leave those involved exhausted. PBS News reports that the average age of caregivers is 49, which is a peak year for career achievement and financial stability. Nonetheless, about 10% of caregivers end

up quitting their jobs to provide full-time care, losing substantial income.

The most common result of caregiving while balancing a job is stress. If left untreated, chronic stress can develop into the following health problems and increase the risk of hefty healthcare costs:

- Anxiety and depression
- Weight gain and obesity
- Sleeping problems
- Heart complications
- Headaches and migraines
- Digestive issues

Resources for caregivers

The demand for caregiving is expected to increase in the near future, as the aging Baby Boomers will soon double the population of those who require care. The

following organizations, groups and agencies offer caregivers a variety of resources, ranging from support services and webinars to tip sheets, care guides and how-to videos.

- **AARP Family Caregiving** (aarp.org/caregiving) – Free care guides, legal checklists, care options and an online community that supports all types of family caregivers.
- **Alzheimer's Association** (alz.org) – Information and support for people with Alzheimer's disease and their caregivers. Operates a 24/7 helpline and offers care navigator tools.
- **ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center** (archrespite.org) – Programs and services that allow caregivers to get a break from caring for a loved one.
- **Caregiver Action Network** (caregiveraction.org) – Formerly known as the National Family Caregivers Association, this network provides information and education for family caregivers, including a volunteer support network in over 40 states.

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- **Eldercare Locator** (eldercare.gov) - Connects caregivers to local services and resources for older adults and adults with disabilities across the United States.
- **Family Caregiver Alliance** (caregiver.org) - Information, education and services for family caregivers, including the Family Care Navigator, a state-by-state list of services and assistance.
- **Hospice Foundation of America** (hospicefoundation.org) - Provides information on issues related to hospice and end-of-life care.
- **Medicare** (medicare.gov) - Provides information about the parts of Medicare, what's new and how to find Medicare plans, facilities or providers.

Also consider the following if you are struggling to balance your career with the demands of caregiving:

- **Adjusting work hours** - Talk to your manager about shift flexibility and how to make your schedule easier to manage. This could entail switching to a part-time schedule, telecommuting, altering your hours or setting limits on mandatory overtime.
- **HR and employee assistance program (EAP)** - Be sure to discuss your options with your HR representative or other knowledgeable staff members. They will likely be able to provide detailed information on company leave policies, as well as determine if your situation qualifies you for any benefits. Also ask about EAP resources. Often

they provide a number of valuable support services.

- **Self-care** - Taking care of yourself is critical when it comes to caring for others. As previously mentioned, EAPs offer great resources, including topics such as increasing resiliency and stress management. Physical activity, proper nutrition, and quality sleep may be hard to come by, but try to carve out time when possible.

While family caregiving can be a genuinely rewarding experience, the caregivers often face common challenges that leave them overwhelmed, anxious and/or intimidated by their duties. It's important to seek a balance between caregiving and your own life.

Recipe

Healthy Recipe: Chicken Enchilada Casserole



Ingredients

- 1/2 medium white or yellow onion, chopped (about 1/2 cup)
- 1 cup frozen corn kernels
- 1 tablespoon ground cumin
- 3 (8-inch) whole-wheat tortillas
- 1 pound chicken breast, boneless and skinless, cooked and diced
- 1 roasted red bell pepper, diced
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can black beans, drained, rinsed and mashed slightly
- 1 tablespoon chopped cilantro
- 1 1/2 cups low-sodium salsa, any variety
- 1 cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese or queso blanco

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. Line a deep-dish 9" pie pan (or Springform cheesecake pan) with foil, then coat with cooking spray.
3. Place a small saute pan over medium heat. Coat with cooking spray.
4. Add the onion, corn and cumin, and cook until corn starts to brown, about five minutes, then remove from heat.
5. Place one tortilla in the bottom of the prepared pie pan.
6. Layer on half of the chicken, diced pepper, black beans, cilantro, corn and onions. Pour on 1/2 cup salsa, sprinkle on 1/3 cup cheese and top with a tortilla.
7. Repeat for the second layer, then top with the remaining tortilla, 1/2 cup salsa and 1/3 cup cheese.
8. Cover with foil and bake for 30 minutes, then remove the foil and bake another 15 minutes.
9. Let cool for five minutes before slicing into six wedges and serving.

Source: Sparkpeople.com