

5 Ways to Thank Caregivers

Show appreciation to those who give so much

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Family caregivers spend a great deal of time caring for family, neighbors and friends — an average of [24 hours of care per week](#), studies show. For some, it's a full-time job. Although it may truly be a labor of love, the truth is family caregivers often feel invisible, alone and unappreciated. That's where you come in. You can make a real difference for your family members, friends and coworkers who are

caring for others. Show them your appreciation. You see what they are doing, and you honor and value them.

I've been a family caregiver my entire adult life for various loved ones, and I can tell you that even the smallest gesture means so very much. It may feel difficult to know what caregivers want and need, simply because they are too overwhelmed to be able to tell you. So, we are making it easy for you – here are some clear ways you can demonstrate your support and appreciation to a family caregiver.

1. Simply say “thank you” to a caregiver and tell them how great they are

Be specific. Thank them for their everyday efforts, not just the especially challenging things. Compliment them on a job well done, whether it's a good meal or a great job handling a crisis. Point out the many ways in which they are making a real difference in their loved ones' lives. Celebrate the victories, small and large. Tell them you see their skills and resilience in even the most difficult of circumstances and you appreciate everything they do.

What that looks like:

- **Mail greeting cards.** We don't often get “good mail” these days, so it's an extra special surprise when we do. Be sure to say thank you for all they do for their loved ones. When I was in the throes of caring for both of my parents and my sister, my best friend sent me a card that said, “She who never gives up!” I posted it in the house, and it frequently gave me a lift and encouraged me to press on (it still does). It gave me confidence.
- **Send edible treats,** such as a fruit bouquet, cookies or a wine-of-the-month club membership. My aunt loves bread pudding,

so I found a place that ships it. My sister once surprised me with a package of chocolate-covered strawberries when I was in the thick of caregiving. Her enclosed note said, “Thank you for all you do for Mom and Dad.” It meant the world to me and still does every time I think of it, even though my parents and my sister have all passed on now.

- **Bring them fresh flowers** – or have them delivered. Fresh flowers bring joy and beauty to our existence and make us feel special.
- **Write a letter.** Tell them they are incredible and explain how important they are and how much you admire them.
- **Nominate them for an award.** Find out if local, state or national organizations give awards to recognize outstanding caregivers or people who are making a difference in their communities. If you can’t find one, create an award for them yourself, complete with a certificate!

2. Spend time with a caregiver

Take time from your busy life to just be with them. Melanie Mitchell, who cared for her mother, expressed it so well: “Sit with me. Don’t just tell me how great I’m doing. Spend some time with me.”

What that looks like:

- **Ask them how they are doing and let them know their response is important to you.** Be clear that their physical, mental and emotional health and quality of life are just as important as their loved ones’.

- **Listen nonjudgmentally.** Help them feel comfortable expressing whatever they are feeling. Let them share their feelings, tell stories, laugh, cry, vent and process their caregiving experiences. You don't need to fix anything; you just need to care and to [validate their perspectives](#). Let them know you see they are having a rough time and you understand. Tell them you know that they sometimes feel resentment, anger and frustration and that those things can coexist along with feelings of satisfaction, fulfillment and joy. One doesn't cancel out the other, so it's OK to express them all.
- **Do things with them on a regular basis.** Walk with them once a week, schedule a weekly check-in call, or take them out for a meal or a cup of coffee or tea. Plan ahead so they have something to look forward to. Be flexible if their caregiving duties mean a last-minute change.
- **Stop by for a visit with them and their loved ones.** Even short visits can change the course of their day. If they are providing hands-on care for loved ones try to avoid their busiest times.

3. Make it possible for caregivers to take a break

Don't just encourage them to take a break, help them make it happen. Assist them in finding the time and enacting a plan. Schedule exercise, haircuts, travel, shopping or their own health care appointments. Offer and follow up – don't wait to be asked.

What that looks like:

- **Pay for some respite care.** It can be through an agency or other paid caregivers.

- **Provide care yourself.** Spend some time with their care recipients in your home or in their home or facility where they live. Sit with them. Watch a movie or read to them. Listen to their stories. Play games, watch a movie, look at photograph albums and listen to music together. Even if the caregivers in your life don't want to leave their loved ones with you, it's a real help to have someone else to interact with those they care for while they get other things done.
- **Arrange for family members to help out.** See if an aunt, cousin, nephew or other close relation will step up.
- **Research other respite care options.** Check out state or local [respite programs](#) or a short-term respite stay at an assisted living facility or skilled nursing facility. Talk it over with them and do as much as you can to follow up and make it happen.

4. Actively demonstrate your support

Help by taking on some caregiving tasks or supporting their lives.

Whether you are with them in person or supporting them from a distance, there are things you can do to help and show appreciation on a one-time or ongoing basis.

What that looks like:

- **Take on an ongoing caregiving task,** like paying bills, ordering medications, making appointments, transportation, etc. This can lighten their everyday load and help them be even better at the things they are doing.
- **Cook or order a meal for delivery for a caregiver and/or those they care for.** Let them know it's coming so they are aware

they don't have to cook that day. (Be sure to follow special diets.)

- **Do online research for them.** Help find health care providers, gather information about health conditions, locate medical equipment or find just the right gadget to meet a special need.
- **Do housework and yard work (or hire someone to do it) at their home or their loved one's home.** Cleaning, mowing the grass, handling holiday decorations and other tasks on top of caregiving can be overwhelming. Fix things or pay for a handy person to do so.
- **Help them get organized.** [Ease their stress](#) by tackling that messy closet or cabinet, organizing medical supplies, cleaning out the refrigerator or clearing clutter in the home. You can even hire a professional organizer to guide or do the organizing.
- **Run errands.** Pick up groceries, care supplies, household items or dry cleaning, or arrange and pay for delivery.

5. Encourage a caregiver's self-care

Tell them you appreciate them and encourage them to appreciate and nurture themselves too. Remind them [it's not selfish to care for themselves](#); it's practical. They need to "fill up" so they have the internal fuel to keep on caregiving. And they will be better caregivers too.

What that looks like:

- **Thank them with a gift certificate.** Treat them to a massage, facial, manicure/pedicure or another pampering treatment. But don't stop there, or they may never use it. Help schedule the

- appointment, provide transportation and arrange backup care – or maybe have fun getting treated together.
- **Sign them up or buy tickets** for a class, movie, art exhibit, festival, exercise session or another local community event. Better yet, pick them up and go with them!
 - **Help them schedule their wellness checkups.** Offer to do online research to help them find a health practitioner. Help them make appointments. Drive them to checkups and celebrate their self-care efforts by having lunch or coffee afterward.

I moderate AARP's [Family Caregivers Discussion Group](#) on Facebook, and giving and receiving thanks is a frequent topic of discussion. As group member Jaclyn Strauss said in a comment recently, "A simple moment to pause and say thank you can go a really long way!"

So, I urge you to take a moment to thank the caregivers in your life today in a way that is meaningful to them – it may be a small thing to you, but it may make a bigger difference in their lives than you will ever know.

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