

# Caring



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Andy Spano

## A Message from the County Executive

In November, Westchester County joins communities across the nation in recognizing the ever growing number of wives, husbands, relatives, adult children and friends who act as caregivers for others.

National Family Caregivers Month offers a great time to thank a caregiver – perhaps by offering to help out for a few hours. It's a time to draw attention to the many challenges facing family caregivers, raise public awareness about family caregiving and advocate for stronger public policy on caregiving issues. Finally, it is a month to remind caregivers to *take care of themselves*.

This year, National Family Caregivers Month -- sponsored by the National Family Caregivers Association -- encourages family caregivers to take three steps every day to make their lives easier, improve care and raise awareness about their continued commitment. The steps are:

- *Believe in Yourself.*
- *Protect Your Health*
- *Reach Out for Help.*

**The 2006 program emphasis the need for all of us to help family caregivers protect their health in order to have a more satisfying life and be better able to provide their loved one with the best care possible.** Taking care of an older relative or friend can be challenging. Whether you prepare meals, drive your mother to the doctor, or provide 24-hour care for your spouse, you are making an invaluable contribution to your loved one's life. But you shouldn't do it alone.

That makes this season an ideal time for caregivers to find out how Westchester County can help them. And, the county Department of Senior Programs and Services' Family Caregiver Support Program certainly offers a host of help – ranging from counseling, to special programs to referrals. You just have to *reach out*.

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## From the Deputy Commissioner Diane Booker

The holidays are supposed to be a season of happiness, with families and friends enjoying each other. For many seniors, however, the holidays actually trigger feelings of sadness and loneliness.

There are many factors that contribute to those feelings and they may persist despite how hard a caregiver works to overcome them. It is natural for seniors to think back on past holidays and miss deceased spouses, family members and close friends. They may be wistful that they can no longer throw the holiday meal, attend neighborhood parties or even afford to buy gifts. And, they may feel abandoned when grown children meet social obligations of their own.

**As caregivers, however, you need to understand the difference between a normal case of "holiday blues" and depression, and know when and how to seek help for your loved one.**

The reality is that seniors are at increased risk for depression; in fact, suicide is a major cause of death in the elderly. Seniors, however, often ignore depression for a variety of reasons. They may discount their feelings as a normal part of aging or believe that seeking treatment will result in them being labeled "crazy." Moreover, primary care doctors don't always accurately diagnose depression in seniors. Depression can occur in anyone at any age. Because the term "depression" is often used to describe a low mood to severe depression, it is easy to become confused over whether sad feelings are normal or a cry for help.

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## From the Deputy Commissioner

Seniors, like everyone else, feel sad, blue or depressed from time to time. Sadness is a normal reaction to loss, life's struggles, or injured self-esteem. But sometimes these feelings become so intense that they interfere with an older person's ability to think, work, eat, sleep, enjoy being with others or care for themselves. Depression that disables a life requires immediate attention and treatment.

The National Institute of Mental Health reports that more than 2 million of the 34 million Americans age 65-years-plus suffer from some form of depression; that age group also has highest suicide rate. Over the next 25 years, as the nation's baby boomers age, the number of Americans with late-life mental or emotional problems is expected to climb to 15 million – a surge of epidemic proportion.

## What causes depression?

People get depressed for different reasons. Factors can include:

- **Drugs** – Depression can be a side-effect of one or more medications, including sedatives and tranquilizers or some used to treat high blood pressure, Parkinson's disease or inflammation. Alcohol can also cause or intensify depression.
- **Illness** – Depression can result from Thyroid disease, pernicious anemia, brain tumor, Parkinson's disease, cancer, kidney disease, electrolyte imbalance and some other illnesses. Illnesses that affect independence can also be a trigger.
- **Personality** – People with low self-esteem, or who tend to be highly self-critical, pessimistic, unusually passive and or easily overwhelmed by stress are more at risk.
- **Sensory Loss** – Loss of sight and hearing, which can lead to isolation.
- **Stress** – Living in highly stressful situations, such as caring for a spouse with dementia, living in poverty, or experiencing declining health.

**Visit a Caregiver Resource Center** Caregiver Resource Service Centers provide advice, information and services to assist caregivers in their role of caring for an elderly family member. Our five Full Service Centers are staffed by professionals who can provide direct services and referrals. Please call to make an appointment at any of the following centers:

Westchester County  
Department of Senior  
Programs and Services  
9 So. 1st. Ave., 10th Floor,  
Mt. Vernon, NY 10550  
(914) 813-6300

Northern County Senior Services  
1974 Commerce St., 3rd. Floor,  
Yorktown Heights, NY 10598  
(914) 245-2094

ElderServe  
170 Hamilton Ave.(at the Lighthouse)  
White Plains, N.Y. 10605  
(914) 683-7530

Yonkers Office for the Aging  
2 Park Ave., Yonkers, NY 10701  
(914) 377-6822

Alzheimers Association  
785 Mamaroneck Ave.  
White Plains, N.Y. 10605  
(914) 428-1919

**Resource Centers** You can find literature, Internet resources, videos and other information on caregiving in designated sections at the following local libraries:

Greenburgh Public Library  
300 Tarrytown Road  
(914) 993-1600

Ossining Public Library  
53 Croton Ave.  
(914) 941-2416

Rye Free Reading Room  
1061 Boston Post Road  
(914) 967-0480

Somers Library  
Route 139, Reis Park  
(914) 232-5717

Katonah Village Library  
26 Bedford Road  
(914) 232-3508

Field Library -Peekskill  
4 Nelson Ave.  
(914) 737-1212

Scarsdale Public Library  
54 Olmstead Road  
(914)722-1300

Warner Library- Tarrytown  
121 N. Broadway  
(914) 631-7734

New Rochelle Library  
One Library Plaza, 3rd. Fl.  
(914) 632-7878

Port Chester Library  
1 Haseco Ave.  
(914) 939-6710

John C. Hart Memorial Library  
1130 Main Street, Shrub Oak  
(914)245-5262

White Plains Library  
100 Martine Ave.  
(914) 422-1400

**Caring  
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The death of a spouse, adult child or friends, and life changes such as divorce, retirement, or moving can also be triggers.

- Heredity – Genetic factors, however, rarely occur for the first time in late life.
- Biochemical imbalances.

**Caregivers need to learn how to recognize depression. Not every depressed person experiences the same signs. But if your loved one shows a cluster of the following signs, he or she may be depressed:**

- **Persistent sad, discouraged, anxious or “empty” mood**
- **Feeling of hopelessness, pessimism**
- **Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness**
- **Loss of interest in work, hobbies, social life, and sex**
- **Decreased energy, fatigue, feeling slowed down**
- **Insomnia, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping**
- **Appetite and/or weight loss, or over eating and weight gain**
- **Restlessness, irritability**
- **Thoughts of death or suicide; suicide attempts**
- **Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain**
- **Difficulty in concentrating, making decisions**

Remember, seniors with depression often do not complain of depressed mood or a loss of interest or pleasure. Because of the stigma routinely associated with mental illnesses, many seniors are hesitant to report or discuss symptoms of depression. Many seniors grew up in an era when people didn't talk much about feelings. They may feel that depression is a sign that they are “weak” or “crazy,” or lead to their family putting them in a mental institution or nursing home. Pay attention, instead, to their actions. Social withdrawal, abandoning hobbies, decreased activity without apparent physical cause, or the onset of alcohol or prescription medication abuse are calls for attention.

## How to help

If you ever suspect a loved one of being depressed, encourage your loved one to see their doctor, or better yet, a psychiatrist right away. Even when depression coexists with an illness, it should be treated. Depressed people often can't take the initiative to see treatment, and they may resist help. You should never force a person into treatment or threaten institutionalization. Avoid putting yourself in a power struggle with the person who refuses help. He has a right to remain depressed even though it's uncomfortable for you, as well as him. Only when a person's life is in danger should you intervene without permission. Instead, in talking to the older person, communicate your concern and caring, and give hope. And, don't give up trying.

Don't try to solve the problem by yourself. Your best strategy is to locate and use available resources. Consult with a professional who is knowledgeable about mental health issues in later life and believes older people can recover from depression. To find such professionals, agencies or psychiatric hospitals in your area that specialize in geriatric mental health, contact from your loved one's primary physician. You may also call the Westchester County Department of Senior Programs and Services at 813-6300 to request a free copy of the county publication, *The Senior Citizens Guide to Mental Health Services*. The guide offers seniors and their families a starting point to find information on mental health programs, counseling, dementia, addiction, supportive services, and related insurance questions. The mental health guide, a collaboration between the county, the Westchester Public/ Partnership for Aging Services and The Institute of Geriatric Psychiatry of Weill Medical College of Cornell University, was funded by the National Institute of Mental Health.

Remember, depression is one of the most treatable disorders. People can and do move out of depression and back toward a happier life.

## Upcoming Events for Caregivers

### *Free Events for Seniors and their Caregivers*

Caregivers of senior citizens face enormous challenges but can tap into many resources to help make their responsibilities a little easier. This month, to honor National Family Caregivers Month, seniors and caregivers are invited to the following events:

#### *Free film*

On Nov. 15 at 2 p.m., the film “A Trip to Bountiful” will be offered at the New Rochelle Library, One Library Plaza. Family and friends who are providing care and assistance to their elderly loved ones can enjoy the film, in which Geraldine Page portrays an elderly woman forced to live with two family members. A discussion of the film and how it relates to caregiving will follow.

Those who attend can also obtain free information on various resources available for caregivers in Westchester County. For further information, call 914-245-9167.

#### *Mount Vernon Hospital program*

The Caregiver Coalition of the Westchester County Department of Senior Programs and Services in conjunction with Mount Vernon Hospital is sponsoring an Outreach event on Nov. 14th. The event will be held in the lobby of Mount Vernon Hospital, located at 12 North Seventh Avenue, Mount Vernon, from 11am to 3 pm.

There will be a wealth of free information on services for caregivers in Westchester County, and professionals in the field will be on hand to answer questions. For further information call 914-245-9167.

#### *One-to-one counseling*

To learn more about the help available to caregivers, attend one-on-one talks with a trained caregiver counselor on Nov. 20 from 1 to 3 p.m. at the New Rochelle Library, One Library Plaza. No reservations are needed.

The program is open to Westchester County residents.

Caregivers can talk to the counselor about such topics as respite services, caregiver support groups, ways to cope, how to involve the family, safety programs for older drivers, communicating with health care professionals and planning for the future.

For more information, call (914) 245-9167.

All of the above programs are sponsored by the Family Caregiver Support Program of the county’s Department of Senior Programs and Services and the local libraries.

### **“Shred Mobile”**

Westchester is taking a stand against identity theft – with a new paper-shredder truck that can help residents destroy unwanted personal papers and documents with personal identifying information.

“Old documents and bills are a gold mine for identity thieves,” said County Executive Andy Spano. “Shredding is a great way to protect yourself from becoming a victim.”

One of the best ways to minimize the risk of identity theft is to shred all documents no longer in use that have personal identifying information such as name, address, phone number, credit card number or Social Security number. Such documents should be shredded before they are thrown out in the garbage. Among the documents that should be shredded before disposal are pre-approved credit card applications, old credit card bills and receipts, expired credit cards and driver licenses, old utility bills, and junk mail that contains residents’ names, addresses and other identifying information.

The county plans to make the Shred Mobile available at household chemical clean-up day events and areas that have public access such as municipal recycling depots or senior community centers.

For more information, call the county’s recycling office at 813-5420.

**Westchester  
County  
wants to  
contact YOU  
in an  
emergency**

Give us your  
e-mail and/or  
cell phone  
number, and  
sign up at

[www.westchestergov.com/cens](http://www.westchestergov.com/cens)

## Message from the County Executive *Cont'd from page 1*

Look inside this issue for a glimpse of the programs being offered this fall for caregivers, including one-on-one informational sessions and a special film-and-discussion night.

Throughout the year, however, the family caregiver program is here to help you. Trained social work staff are available to assist caregivers in designing a plan of action. The program can provide referrals to respite services, case management, and other caregiver resources. Staff can help you provide the best care to your older relative, and also help you care for yourself.

In addition, the program oversees full-service Caregiver Resource Centers, and unmanned centers at public libraries throughout the county where manuals, booklets, newsletters and videos on caregiver issues can be obtained.

There's a reason we provide all these services for caregivers: there is a growing need for help. Nationwide, more than 50 million Americans serve as caregivers, with family caregivers providing 80 percent of long-term care in this country.

Caring for an elderly loved one can bring feelings of joy and satisfaction as well as feelings of frustration and grief. Often, caregivers do not ask for help, and end up feeling overwhelmed, frustrated and even depressed. The successful caregivers are those who learn to accept the changes each day brings and seek out information and support. So this November, remember to reach out for help.

*For more information about the above programs, or to make an appointment for a free caregiver consultation, please call (914) 245-2094.*



## An Answer to Your Questions *Ask Mary Edgar-Herrera about caregiving*

**Q.** I am a 44-year-old man who is noticing that my parents are slowing down and seem to need my help more and more.

I am not married and have no siblings, so their care is going to fall on my shoulders. I have read some articles regarding caregiving, but I feel a little concerned about my ability to care for my parents. Do men make good caregivers?

**A.** Absolutely! Men are providing services for their loved ones more and more, and doing a great job. In fact, a recent study shows one out of every three caregivers are male. Both men and women caregivers share many of the same concerns when caregiving; balancing work and family, worrying about the financial aspects of caregiving, and worrying about their loved one's future.

In some ways, men acting as caregivers may experience more stress. They may be uncomfortable asking for help, feeling they should be able to handle everything themselves. They are less likely to discuss their caregiving concerns with friends, which is a way to relieve stress for many caregivers. They are also less likely to discuss their caregiving issues with their supervisor at work, ask for flex time, or for time off, which may help ease their burden. They also may not feel competent to take care of their loved one's personal care needs, and may need help in finding someone to do so. The best way to start on your caregiving career is to contact the Family Caregiver Support Program at 914-245-9167. Our trained staff can discuss your individual caregiving situation with you and provide you with the information you need to succeed in your caregiving role.

**If you have any questions about caregiving, send it to Mary Edgar-Herrera at the Department of Senior Programs and Services, 1974 Commerce St., Room 209, Yorktown Heights, NY 10598, or e-mail her at [mle5@westchestergov.com](mailto:mle5@westchestergov.com). Ms. Edgar-Herrera will answer questions of general interest and can withhold your name if requested.**

## In Brief *Tips and services*

### Help for Older Drivers

Caregivers, family and friends frequently don't know where to turn when they are worried about the safety of an older driver.

Fortunately, there is help. The Westchester County Department of Senior Programs and Services' Older Driver Family Assistance Program can assist with information, referrals to driver safety programs, in-car evaluations, vision rehabilitation and driver retraining.

As a first step, the program offers a free Older Driver's guide designed to help those who are concerned about an older driver's ability and safety, want to know how to make those concerns heard, and learn more about the resources available to their loved one. It can also help caregivers identify resources in Westchester County that can help keep an older driver driving safely. For seniors who can no longer drive safely, it offers information on options for transportation.

For a copy of the guide, contact the Older Driver program at (914) 245-2094. The program can also put caregivers in contact with professionals who can help with individual concerns and situations.

### Emergency Planning

Are you prepared for an emergency? Consider signing up is the County Emergency Notification System, or CENS. CENS is designed to help the county contact the public directly during certain types of emergencies. To do that, however, we need you to give us your email addresses, home and mobile numbers. With that information in hand, the county could reach

out to the public, during or after a major storm or other disaster, through calls, emails and text messages. Residents could get immediate updates on what's happening, for example, or find out what they should do or where they should go.

CENS is not designed to replace individual or family emergency planning. What it would do is give the county one more way to keep people informed. The system, including automated outbound calling, also could eventually let us contact people by cell or home phone during a localized emergency, such as a major road closing or flooding. Information could also be provided after an emergency about issues such as road or health hazards, supplies, re-entry to damaged areas, etc.

People can sign up to be contacted by going to [ww.westchestergov.com](http://ww.westchestergov.com) and clicking on the emergency banner at the top of the page. Or seniors and their caregivers can also call 914-813-6300. All information will be kept confidential.

Individuals and families should continue to take all necessary steps to prepare for an emergency.

### Help Out a Caregiver

This November, the nation marks National Family Caregivers Month in recognition of the millions of Americans who are helping to care for an older family member or friend. The Westchester County Department of Senior Programs and Services' Family Caregiver Support Program is urging county residents to honor the contributions caregivers make by giving them a break. Consider asking a caregiver

you know whether they want help around the house or a hand in preparing for the holidays.

You can offer to:

- Mow and rake leaves
- Winterize the home
- Clean out the refrigerator
- Wash windows
- Organize closets
- Do laundry
- Rearrange furniture to best accommodate care needs
- Prepare and freeze meals
- Washing the car
- Or, set up holiday decorations.

### Information on Alzheimer's

If you coordinate care for a loved one with Alzheimer's disease, you can get online help. In a free web seminar, you will learn about planning for long-term care, appointing someone to make health care decisions for you in the event you cannot, and getting Medicare-covered services for people with Alzheimer's.

Go to [www.medicarerights.org/webseminar.html](http://www.medicarerights.org/webseminar.html) to view the recording.

### Join the Mailing List

If you would like to be on our mailing list for future issues of Caring, please call (914)245-2094.