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National Center on Caregiving

Published on *Family Caregiver Alliance* (<https://www.caregiver.org>)

Saying 'Yes' to Offers of Help

By Family Caregiver Alliance

How do you respond when someone asks, "Is there anything I can do?" More likely than not, your response is, "Oh no, I'm okay." And when friends say "Let me know if I can help you," do you call them?

It is sometimes difficult to say we need help—so we don't. Learning to say "yes" to such offers is really a gift you give to yourself as well as to the person who offers. It's simple, really: People feel good when they do something nice for someone else. And when they help by providing respite and assistance in a caregiving situation, it's even better.

Caregivers may be reluctant to accept help, because they feel they should be able to handle everything themselves. They may feel that caring for a loved one is their responsibility—and theirs alone. Or perhaps they're afraid something will happen while they are away from their loved one. Some might think that accepting help is a sign of failure or selfishness—that you're enjoying yourself when your loved one can't any more. We often think that our loved ones can't get along without us. Or we don't want to burden others with our cares.

But the fact of the matter is that breaks and support during the caregiving journey are a must. They reduce burnout, help you to be more patient with loved ones, and can even prevent premature placement in a nursing home.

As you approach your relatives and friends, remember that it is better to ask for help directly than to hint. And it's much better to do so before you are desperate (when hearing "no" would be really hard).

Often caregivers don't know what to say when someone offers help. To start, you will be more successful if you match the request with a particular talent or interest of the person who is offering. For example, if someone likes to cook, suggest meals.

Post a task list on the refrigerator or attach it to the calendar or another easily visible location. When someone asks you if they can help, refer to your list and say "YES." Let them choose what task on the list they would like to do.

You don't need to feel indebted to those who help—your sincere appreciation of their help is thanks enough. People understand that you may not be able to return the favor. Little remembrances such as flowers or sweets let people know you care. Learning to receive graciously is a talent we all need to develop.

To make it easier to say "yes," here's some language to use, and a list of things to say "yes" to:

- Read a book to my loved one, watch TV with my father, listen to music with my Mom, entertain my husband so I can have a break
- Help us in the garden: mow the lawn, pull weeds
- Go shopping for me, or pick up a few items for me when you're at the grocery store
- Run errands like dropping off the dry cleaning, picking up pharmacy prescriptions, returning books or videos to the library, or taking mail to the post office
- Drive to an appointment
- Be available for talking—help me to laugh and have perspective on my situation
- Call once a week to let me have adult conversation about anything other than caregiving
- Help with a project—it's always easier to do things with someone else's encouragement
- Stay with my loved one so I can go to religious services, take a nap, attend a support group, go to a doctor's appointment, get a haircut, get a massage
- Go to lunch with me or a movie, take a walk with me and help me get some exercise
- Walk the dog or take my pet to the vet
- Do research on the Internet about new treatments
- Call and find out about local resources
- Sort the mail, throw out junk mail
- Wash the car or get some gas
- Give a haircut to my grandfather, or a manicure to my aunt
- Help me fill in forms, deal with medical insurance issues
- Stay with Dad once a month for four hours so I can do whatever I want
- Take Mom for a drive so I can be alone, just for a little while

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Source URL: <https://www.caregiver.org/saying-yes-offers-help>