

# Caregivers Can Travel!

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Are you caring for an older adult? Caregiving can be physically and emotionally challenging, so it is important to take an occasional break. With colder weather around the corner, now is the time to consider a travel trip.

“Caregivers sometimes need a reminder to take care of themselves,” says caregiver expert Gloria VanHaitsma RN. “With adequate planning, travel can help caregivers and their loved ones recharge their batteries.”

The caregiver may choose to travel solo. Peace of mind is key! Many rely on family members and/or professional caregivers to care for their loved one. Skilled nursing facilities or assisted living centers offer short-term respite stays. Loved ones with special needs can stay with relatives who have been adequately prepared by the caregiver or, a home health care professional may be hired to help with personal care or other needs.

The solo caregiver may best enjoy a group travel trip. They can leave travel details like connecting flights and tipping up to the tour guide while meeting new friends and discovering new places. Try a trip where you learn something new, like cooking school. Or, bring an older grandchild and experience museums, camping or amusement parks.

Caregivers can also plan on traveling with their loved one with special needs if they plan ahead, take their time, and keep their sense of humor. Make sure you check first with your doctor to see if travel will be safe for your loved one. Sometimes it is helpful to travel with another person or two in case you need extra help.

Be sure to pack all necessary items, such as assistive devices, hygiene products and medications. Bring along medical documentation and a list of emergency numbers. If traveling out of the country, make sure your passport and/or visa are up-to-date. Regulations have changed and it takes extra time to get a passport.

If your loved one is confused, remember to offer him or her reassurance and don't negotiate. Announce “Here's your coat” versus asking him if he wants to wear a coat. Snacks and familiar games, books or music can be a helpful distraction.

Simplify clothing. It is OK to skip bathing for a day if need be. Limit caffeinated drinks but make sure your loved one has enough fluids so they don't become dehydrated. Always include enough regular rest stops. Some caregivers carry an “OCCUPIED” sign with them when helping a person of the opposite gender in the bathroom. Ask ahead for handicapped accessible hotel rooms. If traveling by air, you can request that a wheelchair is waiting for you at the gate.

Allow others to help you. It may mean taking your kids up on their offer to care for your spouse or letting strangers open a door for you or allow you to cut in line. Do it with a grateful smile. You deserve the help that is offered and will be a better caregiver in the long run.

**Caregiver's Corner** is provided as a public service of the Caregiver Resource Network. The **Caregiver Resource Network** is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at [www.caregiverresource.net](http://www.caregiverresource.net) or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.