

**Podcast Transcript**  
**Preparing for the Cost of Caring for Elder Loved Ones**

**Barry:** Welcome to Senior Care Corner. I'm Barry.

**Kathy:** And I'm Kathy. Thanks for joining us!

**Barry:** You'll find us online at SeniorCareCorner.com with solutions and information for families and others who care for and about senior adults.

Well today we've got a real good program for you. Kathy's got a feature segment for us on the cost of caregiving that we think is excellent and we hope you'll find very useful. We've got several news items for you and a quick tip.

And to switch things up today, Kathy has agreed to let me give you the news items. And I'll jump right into that.

The first news item is about Social Security which for several years has been a political hot potato. Many people of course, live on the benefits they get from Social Security but a lot of us don't understand its roots.

And as **Social Security Celebrates 75 Years of Public Service**, thought it might be helpful just to give you a little bit of background as one of our news items today.

Of course, Franklin Roosevelt signed Social Security into law in August 14, 1935.

Now the goal of this legislation was to confront change both predictable and unforeseen.

President Roosevelt thought the industrial revolution brought many changes to American life making life and jobs insecure. The law was designed to take care of human needs.

The first field office for the Social Security opened in Austin, Texas in 1936.

The first monthly benefits began in January 1940 with the first recipient being Ida May Fuller of Vermont.

Social Security disability legislation was enacted and added to the program in 1954 by President Eisenhower.

It was in 1965, that President Johnson signed Medicare into law.

If you're interested in learning more about Social Security or contacting them for benefits or with questions, you can reach them on their toll free number at 800-772-1213; most people right now find the easiest and most informative way to reach Social Security is through their internet site. And by far that is the most popular option for seniors and caregivers to do business with Social Security.

A little history item that I hope you'll find interesting but certainly it's nice to know something about something, you know a program that is so critical to so many Americans.

Our next news item is something from the **US Department of Health and Human Services who Recently Announced that Medicare Prescription Drug Premiums Will Not Increase in 2012**, with everything else that's going on, we know that that is something that seniors will find particularly helpful.

New information presented indicates that 17 million Medicare beneficiaries received free preventative services and 900,000 hit the prescription drug donut hole. Those who did saved over \$200 million in June alone. You know, that's significant savings.

Health and Human Services stated that the average Medicare prescription drug premium in 2012 will be about \$30 which remains pretty constant with 2011 when the premium was \$30.76.

The Affordable Care Act will continue to improve the value of the drug coverage for Medicare beneficiaries according to HHS.

They urge you to compare carefully your seniors' plan coverage with other options available in 2012, as they do each year.

**Kathy:** Now this information will be coming out soon this fall, the different plans and what's available. So you really want to pay attention to the new information and see if you really have your senior on the most appropriate plan for them.

**Barry:** And Kathy, I think we're also reading, probably a future news item, but the actual plan selection period will be earlier this year than it has in the past.

**Kathy:** That's correct! It's starting fairly soon. And it will end sooner as well.

**Barry:** So this is something for you to jump on and help your parents, grandparents or other loved ones make sure that they get the benefits they need and don't miss out.

Our next news item is **Americans looking to Food to improve their Health in 2011**.

As Americans age, of course, we are concerned with maintaining our health and reducing our risk for disease. The International Food Information Council provides us with some new research indicating that we are primarily concerned with cardio vascular disease, our weight, and cancer. What's interesting is that 46% of us are concerned with cardio vascular disease, 32% with our weight and cancer, at least in my mind is down there at 22%. I think in the past people have been more concerned about cancer but now realized some of the other diseases are much more prevalent and can be every bit as harmful.

**Kathy:** That's true!

**Barry:** Now, one in five Americans cites healthy aging as a top concern. I think they all realize that we're all aging more and getting older so we want to be healthy when we do it.

90% of Americans can name at least one food associated with health benefits. 76% of us state that foods that can promote health are known as functional foods can impact their health if eaten.

The most popular of these foods are: fruits and vegetables, fish and fish oil, dairy products, whole grains, herbs and spices.

Components such as antioxidants, fiber, and soy can also make a difference to us. However, the research also indicates that we are struggling to incorporate these foods into our diets.

Isn't that just like us Kathy, we know what's good for us, but we still don't do it.

**Kathy:** That's true. We're creatures of habit and it's very hard to change some of these habits. But it can make a big impact on our health, not only on our health but on our senior's health.

**Barry:** Here's another news item that seniors and those that are caring for them or those who care about them are interested in seeing.

### **The National Council on Aging is Suggesting a Benefits Checkup.**

Are our seniors getting all of the benefits they deserve or to which they are entitled?

You can find out by going to [www.benefitscheckup.org](http://www.benefitscheckup.org). This is a non-profit agency. You can enroll in federal, state, local and even some private programs on this site. It might help your senior with electric bills, prescriptions, health care, meals and other things. Certainly you can learn about what's out there and see if there are things that they are entitled to receive but aren't.

You can also apply for Medicare Prescription Help for Prescription Drug Coverage and a Medicare Savings Program.

You can also see if your senior is eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. This program helps buy food to maintain the health of seniors.

If you care a caregiver, there is information there for you too.

They will ask you questions and provide recommendations for your senior's benefits. They don't take money for this, so if you get to a site that's looking for money, that's not, you're not on the right one. But they are sponsored by many companies and social service agencies. It's something to check it out today!

**Kathy:** Very interesting news today Barry.

**Barry:** Ok Kathy, I guess a lot of those news items are related to cost of providing care and receiving care for your seniors. Now you've got something I guess, related to the cost of caregiving.

Now it is not our intention to define what for most people is a labor of love in the terms of dollars and cents. What we want to do is make sure that people understand the cost of giving care to their senior loved ones so that they can prepare for that, budget for that. Whether they are just starting now or anticipating in the future.

What do you have for us in our feature segment today?

**Kathy:** Alright today Barry, we have some great information. I think there may be some tips interspersed throughout all of this information that will help you specifically and your senior get through and make it in this economy especially.

There are about 65 million family caregivers in the United States. You may be one of those. Of those 42.1 million caregivers provide help to adults who are limited in their ability to do their own activities of daily living such as dressing, bathing, going to the bathroom, cooking, cleaning or transporting themselves to the places that they have to get to such as a doctor's appointment.

It's been reported by AARP that the cost of this family caregiving in 2009 was \$450 billion. BILLION.

Caregivers often spend 18.8 hours per week in direct care for their senior loved ones.

It can cost you as much as \$200 per week to care for your senior.

Now, caregiving for a senior loved one is one of the most fulfilling and important things that you'll do in your life. However, you need to be prepared for the unforeseen costs and make plans to meet these costs.

**Barry:** So Kathy I guess we all know that caregiving can be emotionally draining in addition to rewarding but now we're finding that it also can drain your finances as well as your loved ones.

**Kathy:** Right! What we know is that our seniors, our parents, our grandparents, didn't really understand the cost that they would have to prepare for in their retirement. And a lot of them don't have the money to care for themselves as they age. Especially as they desire to age in place.

Now the cost of caregiving may differ depending on whether or not your senior is living with your or if they are living alone or if they are living in some type of facility. So, some of the costs that you may face that you weren't expecting to face include:

Just the cost of gas to travel to them, to get them to watch over them; to pick them up or to drive them around to their appointments; or just for their enjoyments, taking them out to the park or just out to see the flowers. But don't forget also there's a cost for your car maintenance. Those are things that we don't think about, but oil changes and tires, etc. they take a toll on you when you're going back and forth.

We also want to remember there's cost involved with utilities when you have an extra person who may be living with you; the cost of electricity, water, sewer, or garbage, heating, oil, gas. They can kind of add up when you have another person who's not remembering to turn the lights off 24 hours a day.

**Barry:** If you weren't going to be home all day, but now that you have somebody in the house; you're running the air conditioning and heat all day. That can run up the bill quickly.

**Kathy:** That's correct. That's very true.

Now, also remember what if they're living in their own home but they can't afford some of those costs. You may be not only paying for your own household, but you may be paying for their household as well.

There's also the cost when someone begins living with you in your home: the cost of extra food, groceries, and health and beauty items. Those things add up more quickly than we want to consider. And again, it may be that you're stocking their refrigerator and your refrigerator.

There's also the cost of the needs that your senior has that may not be covered under insurance. Things such as durable medical equipment like: walkers or special hosiery, a raised toilet seat that they need to get in and out of the bathroom. Things like that that they may not have and they really need and it will benefit them and keep them healthy. A lot of times insurance does not cover the cost of those items.

**Barry:** Or even if it does, you know often you'll find yourself in the store and you'll just pick up something for them and not think about it when it shows up on your bill; but again it's something that you've done for them.

**Kathy:** Correct! And also remember, even if insurance does pay for some of these items, especially medical type items, there may be a copay involved that you'll have to be responsible for.

If your senior now can no longer stay in their own home and they are going to come into your home, there may be a cost with fitting their needs with furniture; furniture such as another bedroom set, a dresser, a mattress, a TV for their room, a radio for their room, new sheets and pillow sets, a comfortable living room chair that they can get in and out of comfortably. Those are things that we may not have had available and need to do now that we've taken Mom and Dad into our house.

There are also costs that we know we need to provide things like dentures that may not fit any more and we know that we need to refit a new pair. We may need to buy hearing aids or new hearing aids or hearing aid batteries. It certainly is a cost that adds up quickly, as we know all too well. They may need glasses. These things are not covered by insurance or Medicare generally.

They may find that they are very handy to have a magnifying glass to read their newspaper. They may need more than one here and there, just like your readers; you need a pair of glasses in every room.

They may need visits to specialist physicians who might provide them these items like optometrists and dentists.

There are also numerous medications that you're finding out, maybe for the first time that your senior loved one wants to use; such as antacids, laxatives, pain medications such as Tylenol and things like that. These are over the counter medications that aren't covered by insurance or perhaps their drug plans that you need to buy. And they get costly.

Our seniors have fragile skin and they may need special body lotions and shampoo and soap for their fragile skin.

There are other items that may help them feel better like heating pads or those kind of heating stick on pads that really feel good and can get kind of pricy when you use one every day.

There's another thing that if you bring your senior's into your home that you find will be very helpful and comforting for them and that's to have a full candy dish. It costs money to fill up the candy dish!

Alright we also know that one of the things that seniors enjoy is sitting on the back porch and watching the birds at the bird feeder. Well, birdseed food costs money. Hummingbird food costs money. It adds up month to month, especially over the summer when you could be filling your feeder once a week.

Seniors also need to keep busy during the day, whether they're in your house or alone in their own home. They need books and magazines and puzzles and word searches to keep them busy and have them keep their mind occupied. Those things are not free either!

Some of your seniors may be taking supplements, like vitamins and minerals and special milkshakes and protein powders, and special kinds of foods that you just don't keep in the house; like pureed foods for instance, or special kind of snacks that they like to munch on all day long.

There may be special types of feeding equipment like a two-handled cup or a cup with a lid so they don't spill hot coffee on themselves. Or even clothing protectors like bibs to keep them clean during the day while they eat. You may not have thought that you need it, but as Barry said earlier it may be something you see in the grocery store that you pick up. Those things will add up over time.

If you have a senior who's now living with you, not only is the cost of food and electricity going up but the cost of their laundry supplies. You may be washing their laundry more often than you wash your own laundry. So you've got soap and water and electricity going to the added demand on your laundry services.

As Barry mentioned earlier, if you have a senior living in your house and you're not used to having the power going all day, the cost of air conditioning to keep them cool in the heat can add quite a bit to your power bills each month.

You're going to use your dishwasher more often because you've got more dishes.

There's just going to be an overall wear and tear on your household appliances. We don't think about it, but having someone pacing around on your carpet is going to wear out your carpet faster; additional wear and tear having extra people walking around in your house all day.

How about the cost of long distance phone calls or cell phones that you have seniors making phone calls to family members that is now in your house. These kinds of things we don't really consider but they want to keep in touch with their family and their friends.

You may have more internet usage or need more computers access if they want to stay connected with social media with all their friends and family across the country, or even across the globe.

What if you're not caring for a senior adult and that means that you're going to have to leave your job or cut back on your work hours? That's a cost to you, that's a cost in lost wages. It's something that you don't really want to do sometimes but you have to do because you don't feel like you can leave your senior home alone all day.

There are copayments with medical coverage as well when you go to your doctor or you have a short term hospital stay or whatever. Your senior will have some copayments that have to be made. They may be covered by a supplemental insurance, they may not be. You may have long term care insurance or you may not. So there are some extra costs in there.

How about if you take your senior loved one into your home but they have a pet? So now you're responsible for the pet, the care and the upkeep of the pet. Their food, their vet bills may not be something that you consider. You don't have the heart to get rid of your mother's dog so now you have to take care of it.

**Barry:** Which can be especially expensive and rough on your house if it is an aging pet that's been with them for a long time, so they may be starting to experience health problems just as your parents or grandparents are doing.

**Kathy:** That's correct. And remember there's also wear and tear on your house, not just on your wallet.

You may also have to pay someone to give relief to you. If you're caring for your senior all day long, you've got things to do in your own personal life that have to be taken care of; your personal appointments or just some respite to give you relief. Those additional caregivers that you may have to pay for; may or may not be covered under a long term care insurance policy. Maybe you don't have friends and family that can come and give you some relief. Those extra helpers will cost you some money.

**Barry:** Definitely!

**Kathy:** Alright, we also know that there may be cost, especially if you're not staying in the home with your adult, senior adult loved one. You may be really worried about their safety and decide that there's some technological assistance that you can provide and have installed in their home and that's going to cost some money as well. There may be safety devices, alarms, monitoring devices; things like that that are very important and can be extremely helpful. There are many of those that we've covered on previous podcasts, as well as on our blog posts that you can check out. There's a lot of great technology out there but it can be costly to you. There is a benefit and a pay off, but you do have to put some money in up front.

**Barry:** Yeah, definitely. And again, there's a lot that you can do and there are different things out there, different companies; but take a look at what your needs are before you jump in something too. You could spend a whole lot of money, as with other things in technology, to get things you don't really need. Keep your eyes open and you can find some things that actually be savers for you along the way.

**Kathy:** Right! They may cost up front but they can save you money down the line, that's true, good point.

You may have to pay someone to do what you don't have time to do for yourself anymore. That's kind of a hidden cost. Are you spending so much time caring for your senior that you don't have time to maintain your own yard? You may need to have someone come and cut your grass for you. Or even do your own home maintenance, like clean gutters or paint; those are things that you used to be able to have time to do for yourself and you no longer do.

**Barry:** Certainly that's; you've got to really take into account those things, you know the value of not only your time but the cost of replacing your time in the things that you've once done yourself.

**Kathy:** Correct. Now if you are bringing a senior into your home, there are things and modifications that you may now need to make to your own home. Things you've done for them in their home but now that they are living with you, you need such as grab bars in the bathroom, lights to find their way in the middle of the night, nonskid surfaces on the floor; you may need a ramp to your own front door now, or handrails to help them get in and out of your own home safely.

**Barry:** And how many people do we hear from or read about that have to convert a first floor living room, for example, into a bedroom for parents who are able to negotiate the stairs anymore.

**Kathy:** That's correct. And a lot of times what we don't think of is that we pretty quickly realize that we have to watch the floor surfaces but we don't remember that we have to add hand rails to help them get up and down. So there are costs involved.

How about just buying them clothing? You're washing; they have older clothes perhaps, they haven't felt the need to buy new clothes they may be wearing out. You may have to buy clothing for them.

There may be legal fees involved in the cost of caring your senior. You may want to make sure they have advanced directives and their will is ready. Or you have a power of attorney to take care of their needs once you do make them part of your life and you become their guardian. There are legal fees involved there.

There may be recreational costs that you find that you have to do some entertaining now. You may want to take your senior to a movie or to a museum; or you may want to go out to eat with them just to occupy their time and keep them from being bored. These things will cost you money.

There may be incontinence supplies that you haven't thought about. They may need briefs or clothing changes or sheet changing; again more laundry. So there are some hidden costs there in terms of their continence.

Does your senior smoke? Do they have different tobacco products? Do they use alcohol? Perhaps that's not something you keep in your house. But now when you have your senior moved in with you these are their lifestyle choices and they want to have these products. You may be able to convince them that they no longer need them, but you may not.

**Barry:** And also, do you want to set aside a room in which they can smoke, or provide special ventilation so that it doesn't impact the other people in the house or impact your house any more than it has to. There may be some costs there associated with your loved ones smoking in the house.

**Kathy:** That's true. But again, it may be an argument that's not worth fighting at this point.

There will be also costs to, as Barry said in the very beginning, your physical and emotional health. How are you caring for yourself so that you can handle these extra burdens and care for this loved one, either in your home or not in your home; or even from a distance? It can be even more emotionally draining when you're far away and you're worrying constantly because you can't see what's happening.

Now there are area agencies that can assist you and other people in your family and we encourage you to get the extra help. Again, we heard from the benefits checkup, there may be things out there that your seniors entitled to some help and also benefits that they can access, so there are a few things and I'll give you some examples of that that you can connect with in your community. Of course, there's always Meals on Wheels, as a service that we know, senior daycare that's usually provided by area agency staff, there's Veterans Administration Association benefits that you may not be aware of; there's cost of caregiving for Veterans. Homecare companies, again they can provide you with some care, hands-on caregivers to augment the care that you're able to give; maybe there are some things that you don't feel comfortable doing for your senior and a paid caregiver can do that for you. Perhaps a church group can help. There may be funds available to the church that your senior as attended for years. There are respite care services out there, and some of those respite care services can be provided by disease specific organizations such as the Parkinson's Association and the Alzheimer's Association. I know our local chapter of the Alzheimer's Association provides respite care for those who are caregivers of Alzheimer's patients. Every city and every state has an area on aging that provides countless benefits for seniors so go ahead and check those out.

Barry talked earlier in the news about the SNAP program (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program); this is a government funded program that provides nutrition for seniors. We talked about the Benefits Checkup and here's some websites that you may want to check out: the Benefits Checkup site, Elder Care Locator, USA.gov; they have senior citizens resources that you may really want to try to connect with.

Now we know that caregiving is a labor of love and something that you will be forever thankful that you were able to do for your loved one, however be prepared for unforeseen burdens and take care of yourself so that you can continue to take care of your loved one.

**Barry:** And that's a good point again Kathy, we want to say again that we've had an intended to show caregiving as a financial burden because certainly there aren't a lot of benefits there to having your parents or grandparents in your house or caring for them where they live. I think what we want to do here is to help you in preparing financially for that in these times, money is tight for many people and surprise expenses are particularly harmful. Hopefully with the information we've provided here, you can budget for these needs; budget for what it means to be a caregiver so that you're ready for doing that, you're ready for giving your loved ones what they need.

**Kathy:** And you can also, if your seniors are not quite to the point where they need so much of your care; you can help guide them in their retirement planning to set aside enough funds for their care as they age.

**Barry:** Or for those of us that aren't there yet, it's something to keep in mind. You know that none of us want to be a burden on our children or grandchildren. It's something to keep in mind

when you're preparing what everyone calls "your number", what it takes to retire comfortably. Think about not only what we'll be spending but what it may take to make sure that we're not a burden financially on our loved ones.

**Kathy:** Right!

**Barry:** Well thank you Kathy, that was a great feature segment there and I'm not going to give you a chance for a break here because I think you've got a quick tip for us as well.

**Kathy:** I do have a quick tip.

Many seniors have age-related hearing loss which begins affecting them once they reach their 60's and declines gradually.

If you loved one has difficulty hearing, there are some tips for you:

- 1.) Communicate face to face with them.
- 2.) Reduce the background noises.
- 3.) Use hearing aids if they are called for and keep their batteries fresh.
- 4.) Don't speak too quickly.
- 5.) Pronounce your words clearly, repeating if necessary.

Sometimes we confuse our senior's loss of hearing with their cognition. If you are concerned, have your loved ones ears and hearing tested.

**Barry:** Well thank you Kathy, that's a good tip. And that's what we have for this episode folks; we really appreciate you joining us. Hope you'll connect with us on our website at [SeniorCareCorner.com](http://SeniorCareCorner.com); leave us questions or comments or certainly look us up on Facebook at Senior Care Corner as well.

That's all for this week, until next time, hope everybody has a great day!