



National Study of Caregiving

nsoc & you

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Welcome and Thank You!

Welcome to this edition of *nsoc & you*, a newsletter designed especially for participants in the National Study of Caregiving (NSOC).

NSOC is a nationwide study of people who help older family members and friends participating in the National Health and Aging Trends Study (NHATS). NSOC is conducted annually and can be completed online or by phone.

With five rounds of interviews completed, researchers have been using NSOC and NHATS to study how helping an older adult with daily activities affects things like health, work, and well-being. Research from NSOC can inform how to improve the care experience for those helping older adults.

This newsletter highlights a few recent findings. Thank you for being part of NSOC.



It Takes a Village

When an older friend or relative needs assistance—a ride to the doctor, someone to go shopping, or a little help getting dressed—sometimes there is one—and only one—person who helps. But more often than not these days, care is shared among several family members and friends.

Research with NSOC and the linked NHATS is helping to uncover how multiple caregivers work together to share care responsibilities. For instance, caregivers are especially likely to share household tasks—like running errands—and healthcare-related tasks, such as going to the doctor. They are less likely to share responsibility for personal tasks such as dressing or bathing.

Researchers have also found that collaboration is more likely when the family member or friend needing help has dementia. One study found that having a shared care network is beneficial for older adults with dementia and can lead to fewer unmet needs for care.



Up at Night? You are Not Alone

How well do couples sleep when one spouse is caring for the other? That's a question being examined by researchers using NSOC with NHATS.

Unlike most studies that examine how individuals sleep, with NSOC researchers are able to look at markers of poor sleep in *both* partners. A recent study found that when care demands are high, both partners report worse sleep—including trouble falling asleep, interrupted sleep, and trouble falling back to sleep.

Their conclusion? Finding ways to reduce the demands on spousal caregivers may result in better sleep—for *both* spouses.

Whistle (or Yawn?) While You Work

About half of caregivers to older adults are employed. Some may find that they aren't as productive as they would like to be because of providing care. It may be especially challenging when sleep is routinely interrupted by caregiving.

Using NSOC, researchers investigated how common it is for caregivers to have work disrupted by sleep-related care issues. They found only a small percentage—about 7 percent of working caregivers living with the person they help—report having their sleep interrupted most or every night because of caregiving. Less than half of this group—about 3 percent—had their productivity at work affected.

The good news is that work interruptions for caregivers that are sleep related are relatively rare. For those who find themselves in this situation, however, employer flexibility and paid time off for caregiving can make a difference.

Your Access is Granted

Patient portals are online systems used to interact with healthcare providers. Some older adults and their caregivers use these systems to exchange messages with healthcare providers, view test results, and make appointments.

Using data from NHATS and NSOC, researchers found one out of four older adults have a patient portal that is used. About one out of 10 (10%) older adults use the portal by themselves, 3 percent use it jointly with a caregiver, and 14 percent have a caregiver who manages the portal without their involvement.

Caregivers are more likely to manage the portal in some situations—for instance, if their relative is much older, has dementia, or cannot leave their home. The researchers concluded that as patient portal use continues to grow, it could be an important means for communicating with and supporting caregivers.



Thank you for your participation in NSOC.

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