

May 2024

## Welcome and Thank You!

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

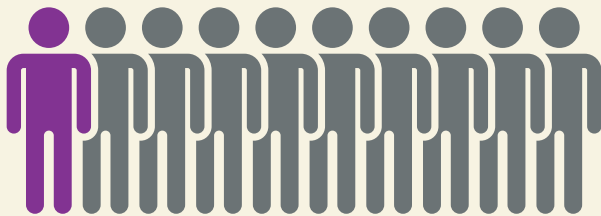
NSOC is a national study of people who help older family members and friends who are part of the National Health and Aging Trends Study (NHATS). The study is conducted annually and can be completed online or by phone.

With six 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.

### Using Respite Services

**One in ten caregivers** reported using respite services in the last year



### When you need a break

Many caregivers need a period of rest from care responsibilities—often called “respite.” Researchers increasingly recognize that it is important for a caregiver’s own well-being to take a break when needed.

Respite care refers to short-term assistance that allows a caregiver to rest or spend time away from care responsibilities. Sometimes other family or friends are able to help. There are also professionals who offer respite care services either in the older adult’s home, at an overnight facility, or at an adult daycare facility.

A recent study using NSOC found that 1 in 10 caregivers reported using respite services in the last year. They also found that having emotional difficulty with care was the strongest predictor of respite care use. The authors discuss strategies to raise awareness and access to respite care services before caregiver well-being is compromised.

## A Dementia Diagnosis: An Emotional Challenge

Most older adults with dementia do not receive a diagnosis right away. Research suggests a timely diagnosis can help improve outcomes for the older adult. However, research on how a diagnosis might affect a family caregiver has been lacking.

A recent study using NSOC aimed to fill this gap. The researchers explored the experiences of caregivers helping an older adult with dementia. About 3 out of 4 older adults with dementia had a formal diagnosis; the remaining adults had symptoms of dementia but no formal diagnosis.

The researchers found several differences between the two groups of caregivers. Those assisting an individual with a diagnosis were more likely to report emotional difficulty with caring. They were also more likely to report family disagreement over the older adult's care. The researchers' conclusion? Findings highlight the importance of providing resources to help both the older adult and their caregivers navigate the complex emotions accompanying a dementia diagnosis.



## What's Up Doc?

Family caregivers often handle complex medical/nursing tasks with little guidance or training. But can better partnerships with healthcare professionals help caregivers with these tasks? A recent study using NSOC examined this issue. Researchers found that slightly less than half of caregivers reported contact with the recipient's medical team in the past year. Caregivers who accessed the recipient's patient portal were more than three times as likely to have contact with the healthcare team. Among those who did have contact, two-thirds said that communication helped somewhat or a lot.

The not so good news? Two-thirds of caregivers also reported that the providers rarely asked if they needed help managing the older adult's treatments. Very few caregivers—just 6%—reported receiving training with caregiving tasks in the last year.



*Thank you for your participation in NSOC.*

[www.mynhats.org/NSOC](http://www.mynhats.org/NSOC)

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