

MAIN STREET MONTHLY

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PAYING FOR NURSING HOME CARE

We Can Help You Plan Your Finances

Do you have a loved one who is no longer able to care for themselves? Are you shocked at the cost of skilled care? Do you wonder whether there are options to help your family member stay at home? Does your loved one need financial assistance to get the care they need? Is there help for seniors who need financial assistance? What are the criteria to qualify?

The cost of skilled care is a common topic of conversation these days. You want to provide the very best care for your elderly family members, but how to do this is often confusing and worrying. What level of care do they need? How will they pay for it?

Most elderly people understandably want to live at home and be independent for as long as they possibly can. But there may come a time when they need more help than family members can provide. Assisted living facilities offer help with some aspects of daily care but not the same level of care as a skilled nursing facility. If your loved one is no longer able to accomplish activities of daily living such as walking, bathing, eating, or managing their medications, they likely need some sort of skilled care. Unfortunately, skilled care is expensive.

Sadly, far too many potential clients wait until a crisis has happened or, even worse, until they or their loved one is nearly out of assets before they come to us to talk about ways we can help. We have run into many cases where a spouse still at home has completely impoverished themselves taking care of their sick spouse due to bad advice from well-meaning people.

Unfortunately, in many of these cases, most if not all of their assets could have been preserved with just a little bit of prior planning.

As lawyers with an elder law focus, we have been helping our clients navigate these decisions for over a decade. We find there are only five ways to cover the cost of long-term care.

1. Spend your money until you are broke.

This is the default option and the one many potential clients start with. While there are a number of ways to preserve assets with proper planning, by the time some clients get to us, they have spent most of their assets and there really isn't much planning we can do. At that point, we begin talking about Medicaid and how to preserve what little the clients have left. Don't let this happen to you! The best time to begin planning is about five years before someone needs care. The second-best time is right now. The longer you put off coming up with a plan, the more care you will have to pay for from your own pocket.

2. Get long-term care insurance.

We are big fans of long-term care insurance when our clients can afford it. This can be a great way to give yourself options and often allows clients to stay home for years longer than they would have been able to otherwise. While we do not sell insurance products, we highly recommend our clients talk to someone who does to see if they qualify and, if so, whether they feel comfortable with the cost of the coverage. Nowadays, most of

these products are actually life insurance policies that allow the client to draw some multiple of the death benefit early if they need care. If, however, the client never needs long-term care, their beneficiaries instead get the life insurance proceeds after the client passes.

3. Medicare

Often, our clients tell us they have Medicare and are planning to use that to cover long-term care costs. That is a mistake. Medicare only covers a short-term stay, typically for rehabilitation. To qualify for this, the patient must be admitted to a skilled facility within 30 days of leaving the hospital. At that point, Medicare pays fully for the first 20 days and the patient's copay is \$200 (in 2023) for up to 80 days. However, our experience is that usually around day 30–40, the facility will decide that further rehabilitation is unlikely to be helpful, at which point the patient must pay the full rate to stay at the facility with no further payments from Medicare.

Again, this is good for a temporary stay after a serious issue such as a fall or a stroke, but Medicare does not really cover long-term care expenses.

4. Medicaid

We get quite a few questions about Medicaid. Keep in mind that while there are dozens of Medicaid programs, the one we are talking about here is Medicaid for Nursing Home care. There are asset and income limitations to this program, and it is designed for people who are unable to otherwise pay for nursing home care. Medicaid has an asset limit for the person going into the facility of \$2,000 in countable assets. If that person has a spouse who is not on Medicaid, the spouse may keep \$66,480.

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5 Documentaries to Watch on Earth Day

Share the Facts With Your Whole Family!

We celebrated Earth Day on April 22. But do your kids know why we commemorate the holiday? Do you? If you don't know much about the history of environmentalism — or just want to learn more about the state of our planet — consider watching a documentary as a family.

Dozens of fantastic films cover everything from the crusade to preserve our coral reefs to how farmers use soil health to enhance the planet. Here are a few of our favorites.

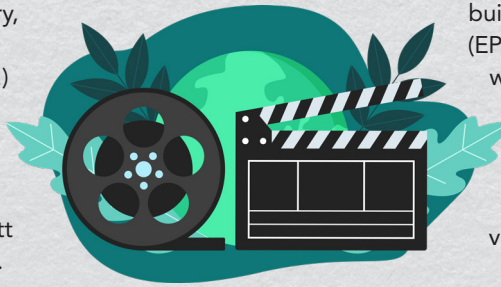
'Kids Take Action Against Ocean Plastic' — This short five-minute documentary from National Geographic follows a group of Hawaiian students determined to clean up their local beaches. It's available for free on National Geographic's YouTube channel! (If you watch it and love this documentary, check out the PG-rated flick "Plastic Island" on Netflix, which tackles the same issue in Indonesia.)

'Brave Blue World: Racing to Solve Our Water Crisis' — This PG-rated documentary about water security takes place on five continents and stars celebrities Liam Neeson, Matt Damon, and Jaden Smith. Check it out on Netflix.

'Extinction: The Facts' — This hard-hitting documentary from famous nature historian David Attenborough is perfect for kids ages 16 and up. It tackles serious topics like species loss, food and water shortages, and the relationship between climate change and pandemic diseases. "Extinction: The Facts" is available on PBS.org or Prime Video.

'Kiss the Ground' — Join actor Woody Harrelson on Netflix for an inspiring look at soil, why it matters, and what farmers and activists are doing to save and enhance it — and our food supply. The documentary is family-friendly and rated G.

None of these documentaries existed in 1970 when anti-pollution activists came together to create Earth Day, build the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and pass laws to protect our air and water. But they're a wonderful extension of that spirit! Hopefully, you'll be able to find time to watch at least one of them this month. After watching, consider taking action and volunteering for a green project near you.



FUNDING YOUR TRUST: OFTEN OVERLOOKED ASSETS

If you've set up a revocable living trust in the past, hopefully your attorney has explained the importance of funding the trust. Basically, if something isn't properly funded, that asset could end up going through probate or unintentionally passing to the wrong person due to an outdated beneficiary designation.

We include a checklist with our trusts to make the process easier, but we still find certain assets are often overlooked. The main ones include safety deposit boxes, home and auto insurance policies, and savings bonds.

First, for safety deposit boxes, we often advise clients to add their trust as an additional owner. That way, even if they are incapacitated, the trustee can still access and manage the contents of the safety deposit box. This also means all the contents of that safety deposit box

will bypass probate, which can keep the contents of your safety deposit box from being subject to final creditors' claims.

Second, your homeowners insurance and vehicle insurance should have your trust listed as an additional insured. That way if something happened to you at the same time something happened to

your home or vehicle, those proceeds would also bypass probate.

Finally, don't forget to have any savings bonds retitled into the name of the trust. These can be a huge pain to probate and can have significant value, especially if they're well past their maturity date. While it may take a little bit of effort to have these re-registered, your heirs will be thankful for it in the future.

Keep in mind that this advice is generic and may not apply to your particular situation. If you have any funding questions or want advice regarding your particular situation, feel free to give us a call and schedule a time to meet with one of our attorneys so we can review how well your trust has been funded.



-TC

WE DO REAL ESTATE CLOSINGS!

We are happy to assist our clients with all their real estate needs. From new home purchases to refinances, we are eager to assist you, your friends, or your family at either our Lexington office or our Aiken office.

If you or someone you know is looking to move in the next couple of months or wants a lower interest rate with a refinance, please let us know.

-Charity, TC, and Jeff

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Please keep in mind that these are just some good numbers to start a discussion. Planning to qualify for Medicaid benefits for nursing homes is a very complex area of the law and well beyond the scope of this article. If you or someone you know is planning for these benefits or trying to preserve assets while qualifying for these benefits, please give us a call so we can discuss this in more detail.

5. Veterans Benefits

Finally, for qualifying veterans, there is a program called Aid and Attendance. Essentially, this program is in place to allow a qualifying veteran (or their spouse, in some cases) to receive extra monthly income to offset recurring monthly long-term care expenses such as in-home help, assisted living, or nursing home care costs. Currently, the net worth limit is \$150,538, though this number does not count the primary residence or other specifically exempt assets. Again, if you have questions about whether you qualify or how to plan for one day receiving these benefits, please give us a call.

At Stratton and Reynolds, we stay current on complex federal and state regulations as well as documentation requirements. We can help you and your family with the complexities of the Medicaid application system and the piles of paperwork involved with the process. It is never too early to start planning. Come and talk to us before you begin the process of seeking skilled care for yourself or a loved one.

-TC and Charity



Find More ‘You’ Time

Developing a Self-Care Routine

Life isn't easy — when juggling a career, family, children, social obligations, and housework, finding time for yourself can be difficult. Studies show that roughly 59% of individuals only make time for self-care after they've become stressed out. Here are some ways to develop a healthy routine that suits your busy life.

Become intentional.

When developing a self-care ritual, it's essential to identify your reasons behind taking better care of yourself and to pinpoint your needs. With a clear vision and motive behind your efforts, developing healthy habits to nurture and incorporate into your everyday routine becomes easier.

Create large and small self-care options.

You don't need to do the same self-care ritual all the time, but make it a point to do something for yourself every day. On busier days, you may only have a moment to take a few deep breaths and mentally reset, but on other days, you may have time for a relaxing bath, massage, workout, or pedicure.

Make time for hobbies.

Most people find themselves constantly juggling countless tasks and obligations. With so much to do, making time for your least favorite activities likely won't happen; instead, do something you enjoy. After all, self-care is about you! Yoga, reading, journaling, jogging, and meditating are just a few ways to get in some “you time.” If you like it, do it!

Plan your self-care time.

Without adding self-care to your schedule, your healthy behaviors may get placed on the back burner. Block off time for your favorite activities: Once it's on your calendar, you're more likely to work a routine into your day.

Keep it simple.

Complex rituals may create more stress or anxiety when you should be relaxing. Instead, keep it simple by focusing on relaxing, breathing, and recharging. Go for a walk in the park, take a nap, get a massage, stretch, or take a few moments to do absolutely nothing. Simplicity is the key.

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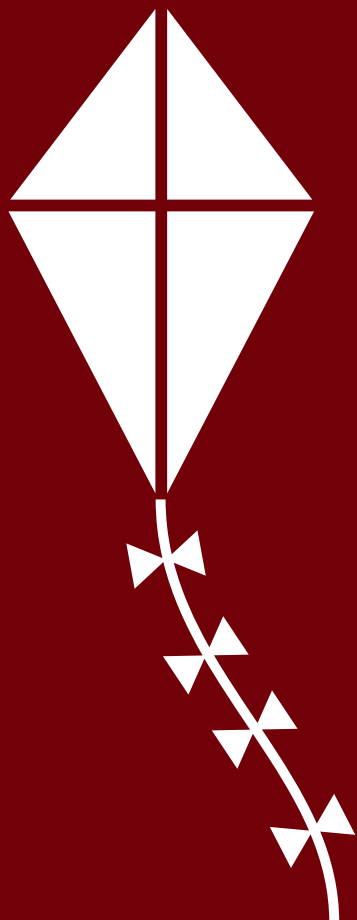
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Fly a Kite Like a Pro

3 Expert Tips and Tricks



Flying a kite is a quintessential spring activity, especially for children. But if you struggled to keep your kite in the air as a kid, you're not alone. Fortunately, you can use a few simple tricks to significantly improve your skills — and help your child become the best kite-flier on the block.

Find the right spot. Hopefully, it goes without saying that you shouldn't fly kites near power lines. Flying it near trees and cars is also a bad idea. It's best to have at least a quarter-mile open space around you for safety and the best wind conditions. Beaches, empty sports fields, and parks with wide open areas are the perfect places to get your kite airborne.

Have the wind at your back. Literally! This position will allow you to watch your kite as it ascends into the air. On a sufficiently windy day, simply holding the kite up by its lowest point and letting go as you unspool your string

will be enough to launch it into the sky. When it's not windy enough for your kite to take flight, try a long-line launch by unspooling about 50 feet of string in a straight line and then taking off running. Remember that kite-flying simply won't work on some days. If your kite keeps crashing tail first, it may indicate too little wind, while a head-first kite fall may mean too strong a breeze.

Keep it tight. Launching your kite is usually the trickiest part of the process, but keeping it aloft isn't always straightforward. To ensure your kite stays in the air, you must retain tension on the string — but not too much. It's time to reel out some of the line when the kite begins to tug. But too much string can weigh down your kite and bring it back to earth. When your line starts to slack, slowly spool it in until it feels taut. Keep your eyes on your kite and your mind on the reel, and you'll be flying like a pro in no time.