



Oliver/Maria Bigstock.com

# The Sandwiched Generation

## A Tale of Midlife Caregivers

by Debbie Pausig

“**T**he Sandwich Generation” is a well-recognized term derived from caring for one’s aging parents and their own children at the same time. It was first coined in 1981 by social worker Dorothy Miller; she originally referred to younger women in their 30s and 40s taking care of both their children and parents.

Which “sandwich” are we? Is it the single, the double or triple decker? Perhaps a more accurate question is what type of bread is our sandwich made of? Is it a “flatbread” with a thin support system on each side? Maybe it is “white bread,” a familiar staple of childhood, which is susceptible to getting mushy from external and internal sources. A robust “hard roll” has a well-formed crust on the outside and

is soft on the inside. How well do we stand up to the challenges of being “sandwiched” in between two age groups?

The Pew Research Center published “Rising Financial Burden for Middle-aged Americans” in January 2013. Nearly 47 percent of adults in their 40s and 50s has a parent age 65 or older and are either raising a young child or financially supporting an adult child. In “The Boomerang Generation” from March 2012, the older of the children, 25-34-years old, are approximately 29 percent of young adults who live with their parents. The parents of these young adults are being held responsible to care for their children longer than expected.

Carol Abaya (*SandwichGeneration.com*), an expert on the sandwich genera-

tion, aging and elder/parent care issues defines three types of “sandwiches”:

- Those sandwiched between aging parents who need care and/or help and their own children are considered “traditional.”
- “Club sandwich” refers to those in their 50s or 60s, sandwiched between aging parents, adult children and grandchildren. It also refers to those in their 30s and 40s with young children, aging parents and grandparents.
- Anyone else involved in elder care is considered an “open-faced” sandwich.

We can commonly identify a familial generation average being 25 years. However, a current norm is delayed parenting with families starting in their mid-30s.

The Pew Research Center published "Rising Financial Burden for Middle-aged Americans" in January 2013. Nearly 47 percent of adults in their 40s and 50s has a parent age 65 or older and are either raising a young child or financially supporting an adult child.

We see increased life span as a result of advances in medical science, healthcare and technology. Just picture this multi-layer sandwich divided between 25 years: 100,75,50,25,1. Five living generations could be present within a family. Today, more Baby Boomers are not only part of the sandwich generation but are seniors themselves experiencing their own health challenges. So who is taking care of whom and what is involved in this care?

Challenges to those "sandwiched" can often include caregiving (physical) and financial support to both the elder and younger on each side. Then there is added need for emotional support. This can result in caregiver stress, burnout, depression, isolation, guilt and financial hardship. Personal time and time with a partner becomes challenged. Time for the "fun stuff" such as hobbies, relationships and self-care become a challenge. The "sandwiched" persons health, career status and/or opportunities are affected. There is a great strain on the "sandwiched" person's mental, emotional and physical health.

Several resources for help include the Connecticut Area Agencies on Aging ([UWC.211ct.org/Area-Agency-On-Aging](http://UWC.211ct.org/Area-Agency-On-Aging)), local caregiver support groups and [Caregiver.com](http://Caregiver.com).

For those sandwiched in between, we need to remember the following:

- Be kind to ourselves
- Drink water

- Be spontaneous
- Give ourselves permission to take a break
- Drink water
- Take a walk
- Eat a healthy snack
- Drink water
- Remember a little mindfulness goes a long way
- Meditate using an app, such as Insight Timer
- Drink water
- Carry a "me bag" with lotion, lip balm, water, a journal, a novel or anything else soothing.
- Laugh at ourselves, laugh with others
- Drink water
- Ask for help
- Know "go-to peeps" for support
- Seek counseling with someone who works with lifecycle transitions, caregiving and similar situations

Caregiver burnout is not an option. Help is only a call, text, email or the turn of a doorknob away. We need only open the door to see help on the other side.

It is truly an honor and privilege to witness and be part of our loved one's aging on one side and growth on the other. But we also need to look out for being a "burned-out overcooked piece of sandwich meat." It is a choice. There are plenty of useful and legitimate resources online to turn to for information. It will help us enjoy our time with our family and allow us to be who we are without losing ourselves. Perhaps the robust "hard roll," a well-formed crust on the outside with a soft inside is just the right kind of sandwich bread to be.

*Debbie Pausig, MFT, LMFT, CT, is a licensed marriage and family therapist, certified thanatologist, grief counselor, national speaker, workshop presenter, Huntington's disease support group facilitator, bereavement facilitator trainer, and VNA Community Healthcare & Hospice bereavement coordinator. She is the author of An Affair Worth Remembering with Huntington's Disease. Connect at 203-985-8246 or [DebbiePausigMFT.com](http://DebbiePausigMFT.com). See directory listing on page 13.*



**CISION** The world's leading source of media research

1. Spry Living – 8,907,303
2. Shape – 2,521,203
3. Men's Health – 1,852,715
4. Prevention – 1,539,872
- 5. Natural Awakenings – 1,536,365**
6. Women's Health – 1,511,791
7. Weight Watchers Magazine – 1,126,168
8. Dr. Oz The Good Life – 870,524
9. Vim & Vigor – 789,000
10. Experience Life – 700,000

**natural**  
awakenings  
[www.naturalawakeningsmag.com](http://www.naturalawakeningsmag.com)

