

CARING FOR THE CAREGIVER: HOW TO OPTIMIZE SELF-CARE

What is a caregiver?

A Caregiver is someone who tends to the needs or concerns of someone with short or long-term limitations due to illness, injury or disability.

Who serves as a caregiver?

Caregivers can be:

- A family member
- Friends, neighbors or members of the community
- Professional caregivers, such as doctors, nurses or nurses' aides

There is a three-legged stool to healthcare, which includes the family caregiver, professionals, and the care recipient.

Is a parent the same as a caregiver?

"Parents" and "caregivers" are not considered to be the same. Parents have a lot more freedoms and eventually children grow up to become self-sufficient adults. The people caregivers provide care for will always need assistance from someone else.

What are signs of caregiver burnout?

Caregiver burnout can lead to a range of signs and symptoms. Everyone will experience different symptoms of caregiver burnout. The earlier you can recognize signs of caregiver burnout, the sooner you can address it to meet your own needs while continuing to optimally provide care for someone else.

- Physical, mental and emotional exhaustion
- Consistently having a negative attitude
- Feelings of guilt if spend time on oneself instead of someone else
- May experience fatigue, stress, anxiety or depression
- Lack of energy
- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed
- Changes in sleep, appetite or weight
- Social withdrawal
- Difficulty relaxing
- Becoming sick more frequently
- Frequently feeling sad
- Neglecting your own responsibilities or needs

10 Tips for Managing Caregiver Burnout

1. **Accept help:** It's ok, and encouraged, to ask for help. No one expects one person to take on a caregiver role solo. Create a list of ways people can assist you, such as taking your charge on a walk to give you a break, or have people that can assist with errands, grocery shopping, or even cooking.
2. **Focus on what you CAN do:** No one is expected to be the "perfect" caregiver. Believe that you are doing the best you can and making the best decisions you can at any given time.
3. **Set realistic goals:** Break large tasks into smaller steps that you can do one at a time. Prioritize, make lists and establish a daily routine. Remember that it's ok to say no to requests that are draining, such as hosting holiday meals.
4. **Get connected:** Many communities have caregiving resources. These can include classes about the disease your loved one is facing, along with caregiving services such as transportation, meal delivery or housekeeping.
5. **Join a support group:** Not only do you not have to do this all alone, but you're also not alone in your experience. Support groups for caregivers can provide validation, encouragement, problem-solving strategies and more. Plus, you can create meaningful friendships that are important to lean on during this time.
6. **Seek social support:** Make an effort to stay connected with family and friends who can offer support and a mental break. Set aside time each week for connecting, such as getting a cup of coffee or a walk.
7. **Set personal health goals:** It's easy to let your own health fall by the wayside while caring for someone else. But if you're not healthy, how will you be able to help another person? Establish a sleep routine, get exercise throughout the week, eat healthy foods and stay hydrated.
8. **See your doctor:** Make sure you're healthy enough to be around someone who is not. Get any vaccines or screenings necessary, and let your doctor know you're a caregiver.
9. **Seek respite care:** These are opportunities to give yourself a break and can include in-home care (such as a health care aide), adult care centers/programs, and short-term nursing homes where temporary care can be provided if the caregiver must take time away.
10. **Practice gratitude:** During your time as a caregiver, it may be hard to remember happier times with this person. Remember why they are important to you and tell them. Keep a journal or gratitude jar where you can write down positive thoughts or memories to reflect on during and after your time as a caregiver.

Self-Care Resources

Apps, books and journals can provide small doses of self-care during the day.

APPS: Headspace; Calm; Insight Timer, The Tapping Solution

WEBSITES: Area Agency on Aging (AAA); The Mindful Center (themindfulcenter.com); Mindful (mindful.org)

BOOKS & JOURNALS: *Practicing Mindfulness: 75 Essential Meditations for Finding Peace in the Everyday* (Matthew Sockolov); *Present Not Perfect* (Aimee Chase); *The Mindfulness Creativity Journal* (Worthy Stokes); adult coloring books