



**SENIOR SERVICES**  
Helping Our Elderly Live With Dignity

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## CARING FOR THE CAREGIVER

As a caregiver, carving out some time for yourself each day may seem impossible, but it's an important part of your role. Taking a break and doing something that you enjoy is necessary and not at all selfish. Time away from the caregiving responsibilities and your loved one can actually renew your energy and help in avoiding personal health problems. Not taking care of yourself can cause you and your loved one to both suffer.

Below are some suggestions to help maintain your physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health.

### Physical Health

Maintain a healthy diet. Find time to exercise even if it's just a few minutes several times a day. A short walk can work wonders to reduce tension and increase energy. Do the best you can to sleep at least 7 hours a night.

Your own physical illnesses should be treated promptly and appropriately. Regular visits to the doctor are important. Talk to your doctor about any problems you are experiencing whether they be physical or emotional.

### Emotional and Mental Health

Maintain a positive self-image realizing that you are not perfect and are doing the best you can. Recognize signs of depression, and take steps to manage it. Ask for extra support from family and friends. Delegate some of your daily and weekly tasks to those who are willing to help. Check out respite services for caregivers or pay someone to come and stay with your loved one to allow time for yourself.

Incorporate activities, such as reading, listening to music, working in the yard or garden, engaging in a hobby....whatever it is that you enjoy, into your day even when you don't feel like it. If you like to participate in church activities or take classes, ask a friend or family member to stay with your loved one for an hour or two once or twice a week so you can do those things. If you enjoy pampering yourself, take a warm bath and light candles or get a manicure or pedicure.

Try to find humor in everyday situations. It eases tension and frustration and can help you enjoy small moments of success. Read light-hearted books or rent funny movies that will make you smile or laugh.

Journaling helps to release feelings and emotions. Write down your thoughts and feelings without thinking about grammar or the right way to say it. Often this provides insights and perspective.

Let go of guilt. Realize that you can't be everything to everybody all of the time. Know your limitations and focus on what is most important.

Caregiving can be an emotional roller coaster. Recognize that feelings of anger, guilt, impatience, helplessness, love and dislike is normal. Acknowledge loss, and allow yourself to grieve.

Recognize when your emotions are controlling you instead of you controlling your emotions. Our emotions and feelings are useful tools to help us understand what is happening to us. We need to listen to them and realize that they exist for a reason. Learn from them, then take appropriate action. Talk with your physician if necessary.

Identify what you can and cannot change. We can only change ourselves; we cannot change another person. When you try to control things over which you have no control, you will only get more frustrated. Ask yourself, "What do I have some control over? What can I change?" Even a small change can make a big difference.

Realize that you do not have to do everything yourself. Others may not do every thing as you do, but their way of providing care can be just as good.

Don't be reluctant to ask for help. You may not wish to "burden" others or admit that you can't handle everything yourself, but neighbors and friends may be glad to help when asked. They may not offer because they don't know what you need. Tell them what you need help with. However if they refuse, do not take it personally. The person is turning down the task.. not you. The person may be happy to help at another time. Try not to let a refusal prevent you from asking again.

## **Spiritual Health**

Nurture your spiritual health to help maintain the peace and strength you carry within you. Try and find a few minutes of quiet time each day. Relaxation exercises or meditation techniques work for some people. Other use inspirational or religious reading or calming music. Some find rejuvenation in natural settings like a park or woods. Use whatever works for you to be at peace with yourself.

Draw strength from your faith. A faith-based congregation can provide the encouragement you need to feel good about your caregiving role, and may also be able to provide a break from time to time.

## **Interpersonal Well-Being**

Maintain supportive relationships in your life. Find people you can talk with who can give you emotional support and keep your spirits high while keeping things in perspective. Talk about things other than the illness or disability you face every day.

Protect yourself from isolation. Keep in contact with friends. Join a support group where you will be around other caregivers. You are not alone, and there are others who understand. You can learn from their experiences and they can learn from you.