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CARE FOR THE CAREGIVER



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Because caregiving can be so overwhelming, it's important to take steps to refresh yourself. At the very least, this will ensure that your loved one always gets the best you have to offer.

- 1) Schedule time for yourself.
- 2) Share your feelings.
- 3) Use community resources.
- 4) Ask for help.
- 5) Cut yourself some slack.
- 6) Eat smart and exercise.
- 7) Attend to your spiritual health.

1) Schedule time for yourself.

Whether you feel like you need a break or not, schedule some personal moments, organize them, and stick to your schedule. Carefully guard any time you do manage to set aside. Learn to say "no" to unnecessary or unfulfilling activities.

2) Share your feelings.

Talking about your caregiving problems isn't complaining. Sometimes, family members assume that you're "doing just fine" because they simply don't know any better.

- | If those you've approached so far don't seem inclined to listen, join a support group. There's one for just about every situation.
- | Try writing out exactly what you're feeling. Sometimes this will banish negative feelings all by itself.
- | The next time someone close to you asks, "What's happening?" use the opportunity to share your feelings. Tell it like it is.
- | If your feelings are really "bottled up" and you're overwhelmed, consider talking to a counselor, psychologist, or mental health professional.

3) Use community resources.

Community resources like respite care and adult day care exist for your benefit. These services are invaluable for caregivers who need to "recharge their batteries."

- | **Respite Care** provides temporary relief for caregivers. Workers take over caregiving responsibilities for a brief period of time, and care can be provided in the home. These services can often be arranged through the local Area Agency on Aging.
- | **Adult Day Care** provides social activities, therapies, education, and supervision in a group

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setting. Find them in the Yellow Pages, under “Health Services,” “Home Health Care,” “Senior Citizen Services,” or “Social Service Organizations.”

4) Ask for help.

Unfortunately, most caregivers operate without regular help from family and friends, but there's no reason to isolate yourself when you don't have to. The most effective caregivers can make reasonable, impartial judgments about both their loved one's situation and their own abilities.

- | Make an honest assessment of your strengths and weaknesses. You may be able to keep your mother's spirits up, but do you have the strength to attend to her physical needs? Be realistic.
- | When enlisting help, be as specific as you can. Don't ask someone to come over “anytime” to “lend a hand.” Set a time and place.
- | Try not to ask someone for help only to make him or her a spectator.
- | Put friends and relatives at ease by explaining the situation in clear terms. Talk to them beforehand, so they know what to expect.

5) Cut yourself some slack.

Enough said.

6) Eat smart and exercise.

You've heard these two before. But exercise and proper nutrition will make you a stronger person. And a stronger person makes for a stronger, happier, more effective caregiver.

Look at good diet and exercise as your responsibilities—your obligations—as a caregiver. This may seem unfair, but the rewards will far outweigh the effort.

- | Investigate classes at community centers and gyms. Unconventional activities like karate, yoga, and square dancing can eliminate the sense of drudgery often attached to traditional exercise programs.
- | Find a regular exercise partner, or even someone who will just join you for a daily walk.

7) Attend to your spiritual health.

Whatever your beliefs, make an effort to look after your spiritual reserves. They are your main source of strength.

- | Keep in mind that your spiritual health is just as important as your physical health.



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- | Many caregivers place a high premium on faith and religious commitment. Religious leaders can offer spiritual guidance in addition to practical aid.

 - | Take mental vacations. Picture yourself in the most remote, relaxing place you can imagine. What are the sounds, the sights, the smells? This simple relaxation technique can decrease anxieties about the future and help you focus.

 - | Review the **Common Feelings** checklist at the end of this section for more ways to revise your spiritual outlook.
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COMMON FEELINGS

Most caregivers feel sad or discouraged from time to time. Ignoring these feelings won't make them go away; it may even make them grow stronger.

- | If you feel sad: Include some pleasant activities in your daily schedule. Listen to your favorite music, spend a few moments enjoying the garden, or talk to a supportive friend.
- | If you feel discouraged: Take one day at a time. Try to stay flexible and accept the things you can't change.
- | If you feel afraid: Talk to someone about the worst thing that could happen and plan what you would do. This can help reduce your fears about the "what ifs?"
- | If you feel angry: Leave the situation if possible. A quick walk can help defuse your feelings. If you can't leave, stop and take a few deep breaths. Focus your anger on the condition, not the person you care for.
- | If you feel guilty: Give yourself credit for what you do well. Be realistic about what's possible and what isn't. Focus on one thing you want to do better and be specific.
- | Finally, take care of yourself: Talk to someone who can help you look at things objectively, perhaps a friend, a fellow caregiver, or a counselor.