

A Caregiver's Guide to Taking Care of YOU



It is not selfish to take care of yourself when you are a caregiver. It is important to your overall health and well being to know you can take care of others best when you take care of yourself first!

Treat yourself to a favorite guilty pleasure -- whether it's reading a magazine, taking a nap or chatting on the phone with an old friend. A few minutes of pleasure and relaxation can go a long way to revitalization and give you the patience and strength required when caring for others.

Just as you would schedule an appointment for a loved one or take time to run errands, make it a habit to regularly schedule some downtime for just for you. Not only will you benefit, but those around you will as well.

Don't be too hard on yourself either! What you are doing is not easy. Whether you are caring for a child, aging parent, or chronically ill person, you are doing your best each day. **Congratulate yourself on a job well done and don't always strive for perfection!**

Manage *your* Stress

Prolonged stress may place you at risk for serious health problems. **In order to keep you healthy and able to care for your loved one, you need to reduce your stress.** Easier said than done, right? Here are a few ideas:



- Practice relaxation techniques like deep breathing, yoga, or Tai Chi. There are many free videos online available to lead you through the techniques. Only have a few minutes? Check out this [video!](#)
- Learn to say no. You have a lot on your plate! Saying no is OK...most people in your life will understand.
- Let others help you. Ask for and accept help from friends and family. If it is in your budget, hire someone to clean or shop for you. You do not have to do this alone.

Take Care *of your* Health

Make your health a priority. **Continue yearly screenings and health check-ups.** Listen to your body -- if you aren't feeling well, be sure to visit your doctor.

You may be busy making sure your loved one is taking their medications properly and on schedule, so be sure to do the same for yourself.

Maintaining a routine and making simple decisions as what to wear and what to cook gives you a sense of control and can feel comforting and familiar.

Information overload can be bad for your health.

Take a break from the news and even social media and enjoy the peace and quiet.



Acknowledge *your* Feelings

It's OK to feel mad, angry, or frustrated! You have a right to ALL of your feelings. Seek support when you need it. Talking to a trusted friend or counselor about your feelings may help! Sometimes you don't need advice, you just need to be heard!



Take Time *to* Relax



Everyone needs some downtime. Take the time to read a book or take a relaxing bubble bath.

Laughter is truly is the best medicine. Viewing some silly cat videos may just be the remedy you need. Whatever gives you the giggles, take a few minutes to tune in and just let it all go! Here are some [good ways to laugh](#).

You don't always need to take a lot of time to recharge. Taking a few short breaks a few times a day can still be beneficial!

Make Time *for your* Hobbies

Spend time doing something you love. Give yourself permission to take time off without feeling guilty.

Reconnect with your old hobbies or discover new interests. You do not need great artistic skills to make crafts or be a *FoodChannel* guru to bake. Just the simple act of concentrating on something you enjoy can go a long way to relaxation and getting a fresh outlook on life.

Need help getting started with some new hobbies? [Check out these ideas!](#)



Eat Healthy

Try to include more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein in your diet. When you're stressed, you'll probably want comfort foods, but they are usually less nutritious options.

Grabbing a cookie or unhealthy snack can lead to feeling worse later. **Keeping portable snacks around like nuts, raisins, or cheese can be great for on-the-go days like doctors appointments and errands.**

Foods that are high in complex carbohydrates stimulate the release of serotonin, the feel-good brain chemical that helps in induce calm, according to some experts. Wholegrain crackers, pretzels, or a bagel should do the trick.



Keep a Positive Attitude



Did you know that smiling is a two-way mechanism? We do it when we are relaxed and happy, but doing it can also make us **actually** feel relaxed and happy!

Write down a list of things you feel most grateful for. You may be surprised how many things you will be able to list.

Pay a compliment to a friend or a stranger. Not only will you make somebody else's day, you will boost your own mood.

Make a list of all the nice things people have said about you and don't be modest. Refer to it when you're having a particularly stressful day.

Exercise Regularly

Mother was right - getting some fresh air does chase the cobwebs away!

A walk around the block can do wonders for clearing a stressed and worried mind.

Those of you who are dog owners know that your furry friend is always eager to go outside. It will do you both good and lead to a better night's sleep -- and some happy tail wagging!

You don't have to run a marathon to gain benefits from exercise. Simple stretches, and even yoga as we mentioned, can help to relieve tension.



Drink a Hot Beverage

Sometimes Sheldon, our friend from the *Big Bang Theory*, does know best! Enjoy a hot beverage! Sipping a soothing chamomile tea is great for relieving stress due to tea's calming properties. Chamomile tea promotes muscle relaxation and helps you to unwind. Plus, it is good for cramping, pain, and gas, so it can help relieve physical pain as well.

Nothing is more comforting on a cold day than a delicious hot beverage. Here are some [easy recipes](#) you can try at home!

Don't forget soups too. Not only are they great tasting, but nourishing as well.



Get Plenty *of* Sleep

Ah, a night of good sleep can tame even the grumpiest of beasts! Your body needs time to recover from stressful events.

Try to stick to the same sleep schedule, even on weekends. This helps to regulate your body's clock and could help you fall asleep and stay asleep. Keep your bedroom cool and comfortable, between 60 - 70° F.

Limit screen time before going to sleep, since all electronic devices emit blue light, which can disrupt the brain's sleep cycle. Try reading or meditating instead.



Give Yourself a Break

Even the most devoted caregiver deserves a break. A few hours, a few days or longer can keep you feeling recharged, refreshed and positive.

Keep your loved one in the loop of your plans and make them feel it is a break for them as well to be with other people.

[Choose an agency](#) for in-home care, or look at respite volunteer programs at churches and senior centers. Seek recommendations from healthcare professionals and friends as well.

Plan and enjoy your time away from your duties. It's not a luxury, but a necessity to your good health!



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