

Tips for Caregivers

8 Unselfish Ways to Put Yourself First

1 Eat a well-balanced diet

When you're stressed out, you may tend to overeat. When you're exhausted, it's easy to resort to whatever is handy; quick snack foods, tea and toast, cheese doodles and pop. You need high quality food to perform well.

2 Get regular exercise

Exercise is the original "feel good" tonic. It helps you sleep better and wake up refreshed and ready to face another arduous day. Regular exercise improves both your mental and physical wellbeing, keeping your mind alert and body fine-tuned and energetic.

3 Get enough rest

This may be easier said than done, especially if you're caring for someone who tends to wander at night. Still, most people need six to eight hours of sleep a night to maintain good health. Catch up with cat naps if necessary, early in the day.

4 Look after your own health

When you're preoccupied with someone else's health, it's all too easy to neglect your own. Caregiving can be physically and emotionally exhausting, leaving you at risk for serious illness.

5 Get organized

It is very important to get an early diagnosis of your loved one's illness, and then learn everything you can about it. That way you'll know what to expect, and you can plan for it.

6 Plan for emergencies

Who will take over if you do get sick? How will you cope if your loved one has a medical emergency? Be prepared. Keep a file or notebook with names and phone numbers of people you might need. In a crisis, you'll be less likely to panic if you're organized down to the last detail.

7 Take time out for yourself

Whether you're caring for a parent, spouse, or other relative or friend, you need time for yourself. You need outside interests, other people, and a way to escape from the constant pressure of caregiving. You need to get away from time to time. Keep up your friendships. It's easy to let friendships lag when you have "more important" things to do. But friends can get you through some tough times, just by being there.

8 Consider joining a support group

If you feel alone and isolated in your role as caregiver, talk to other caregivers. They'll know what you're up against; they'll understand where you're coming from. Think of it as therapeutic socializing—while you're not actually escaping from your role as caregiver.

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