

Caring for the Caregiver



Being a caregiver is a stressful and demanding job. Doctor appointments that must be scheduled; the constant care and attention your loved one needs, both physically and emotionally; the back and forth to grocery stores, drug stores, physical therapy sessions and, most of all, the need to know you are doing the "right thing" for the loved one in need of your care. The daily challenges you face as a caregivers may seldom leave you time for yourself.

But caregivers need time –time to reflect, relax and rejuvenate for at least few hours each week. This "private time" gives you a renewed strength to carry on. It's important to take that time. You deserve it. AND, should not feel guilty about it.

Give Yourself a Break, Right Now

There are ways to allow yourself time away. It's okay to take an hour, a day or even a weekend to collect your thoughts and get back on track. Really! Listen, you've got a very important role to play - if you do not care for yourself, who will step in to care for you AND your loved one.

Here is a list of things you can do to take care of yourself and be a better caregiver for it...

- **Accept help.** Be prepared with a list of ways that others can help you, and let the helper choose what he or she would like to do. For instance, one person might be willing to take the person you care for on a walk a couple of times a week. Someone else might offer to pick up groceries or cook for you.
- **Focus on what you are able to provide.** It's normal to feel guilty sometimes, but understand that no one is a "perfect" caregiver. Believe that you are doing the best you can and making the best decisions you can at any given time.
- **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. Begin to say no to requests that are draining, such as hosting holiday meals.
- **Get connected.** Find out about caregiving resources in your community. Many communities have classes specifically about the disease your loved one is facing. Caregiving services such as transportation and meal delivery may be available.
- **Join a support group.** A support group can provide validation and encouragement, as well as problem-solving strategies for difficult situations. People in support groups understand what you may be going through. A support group can also be a good place to create meaningful friendships.
- **Seek social support.** Make an effort to stay well-connected with family and friends who can offer nonjudgmental emotional support. Set aside time each week for connecting, even if it's just a walk with a friend.
- **Set personal health goals.** For example, set a goal to establish a good sleep routine or to find time to be physically active on most days of the week. It's also crucial to fuel your body with healthy foods and plenty of water.



**One person caring for another
represents life's greatest value.**

~ Jim Rohn



Caring for a loved one can strain even the most resilient people. If you're a caregiver, take steps to preserve your own health and well-being. Remember, if you don't take care of yourself, you won't be able to care for anyone else.