

Caregiving: Your Shared Journey

Tending to the needs of someone you love can be a rewarding experience. There can be a flipside to that experience, however, when constantly focusing on another's needs comes at the expense of your own well-being. When you're always playing catch-up to try and get everything done, or find yourself going through the motions to survive the day, you—and most likely your loved one—can end up feeling deprived of opportunities to connect, make memories, and to be present with one another. Make caregiving less taxing while also enjoying your time together by practicing these helpful tips.

1. Attend to your own health and well-being

This may seem counterintuitive—after all, the purpose of being a caregiver is to tend to your loved one's welfare—but you can't effectively provide care if you aren't in good physical and emotional health yourself.

- **Stay aware of how you're feeling:** Caregivers commonly experience feelings of anxiety and worry, anger, resentment, guilt, depression, and grief. These are all normal emotions, but it's important that you acknowledge them, as they may indicate that you need to take a moment to step back or reach out for support.
- **Take breaks:** As with all areas of life, maintaining balance is key. Whether it's five minutes to yourself outside on the porch or a weekend away, taking the time to recharge and break from routine is crucial to preventing caregiver burnout.
- **Practice self-care:** Perhaps the most important thing you can do is pay attention to and prioritize your own basic needs. Eat well and exercise regularly. Find time to relax and meditate. Spend time with your significant other, your children, and your pets. Socialize with friends and keep up with your hobbies.

2. Make time for meaningful connection

As the title of this newsletter implies, caregiving involves two people, and you're on this road together. Caregiving can certainly make life busy with getting to medical appointments on time, cooking meals, filling prescriptions, and helping your loved one with daily tasks. Remember that each moment you spend together, no matter how stressful or harried, is an opportunity to talk, share, and learn. Ask questions, encourage storytelling, and recall your favorite moments together. Enjoy the precious time you have to make new memories and reminisce about old ones.

3. Don't try to do it all

There's no shame in asking for help. When you feel overwhelmed or feel you've hit your limit on the amount of care you can provide, speak up and reach out. Seek support from other caregivers and ask for and accept help from friends and family. As well, consider looking into local services that can help supplement care.

4. Take advantage of technology

There may be times when you can't be there to care for your loved one in person—whether it's due to physical distance, a disruption in plans, or pandemic-related concerns. Let technology play a role to keep your anxieties curbed.

- **Prepare for life-threatening emergencies:** Subscribe to an electronic alert system that involves a wearable device that can be used to call for help in the case of such an event. You can also install wall-mounted fall detectors throughout your loved one's home.
- **Automate medication time:** Remembering to take medication is sometimes difficult for older adults, especially if they have several prescriptions that are taken at varying intervals. Consider an automatic pill dispenser to help your loved one safely and accurately manage their prescriptions.
- **Inhibit isolation:** Loneliness can be a potentially devastating issue for older adults. Equip your loved one with ways to connect with you and their friends, as well as to the outside world and

information online. There are several devices available that are voice-activated and even some that cater specifically to older adults (like GrandPad and ElliQ).

5. Reach out to your Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Whether you're an experienced caregiver, new to the role, or preparing yourself for what may come, looking after a loved one can be overwhelming. Know that you're not alone and the EAP is available to support you and your family. Call any time, day or night, to speak to a licensed counselor who can help you sort through your questions and concerns, as well as provide resources and guidance to facilitate a more positive, meaningful caregiving journey for you and your loved one.

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a voluntary and confidential employee benefit available to eligible federal employees at no cost.

24 HOURS A DAY

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