

Caregiver Support: Tips for Coping with Caregiver Stress

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If you're a caregiver for a senior, or someone with an illness or disability -- and the stress is starting to wear you down -- you have lots of company. One in four U.S. households provides caregiving, and caregiving can take a toll on a caregiver's health. This important information about [caregiver support](#) explains why caregiving can be stressful, and how caregivers can take care of themselves.

If the stress of being a caregiver is wearing you down and you need caregiver support, you are not alone.

One out of four U.S. households provides caregiving. According to the American Society on Aging:

- Nearly one out of every four U.S. households—roughly 22 million—provide caregiver services to a relative or friend over 50
- 40 percent of caregivers are also raising children
- 64 percent work either full- or part-time
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Being a caregiver is a long-term commitment. For most people who take on the responsibility of providing care to someone with serious health issues, it's not a short-term commitment.

The National Alliance for Caregiving reports that, on average, caregivers spend four and a half years providing care, and about 12 hours each week on caregiver duties.

Being a caregiver takes a toll. Being a caregiver takes a toll on you—physically and emotionally—and it can also create enormous financial pressures that add to your stress.

One study by the National Center on Women and Aging found that, on average, **caregivers lose \$659,130 over their lifetime in reduced salary and retirement benefits.**

How can you cope with the stress of being a caregiver?

Read on for tips on caregiver support that can help you stay healthy and make things a little easier while you're caring for someone else.

It's easy to forget about your own needs when you are a caregiver. But doing that takes a toll on your health.

Here are some caregiver support tips to help you stay healthy and reduce your stress while you're caring for someone else.

Accept your own limits. As a caregiver, you don't have to do it all, and you shouldn't try. Accept that there are limits to what you can do as a caregiver. Admit when you feel overwhelmed, and ask for help.

Create a caregiver support team. Before you can ask for help, you need to know who you can ask. Plan ahead for times when you'll need help by making a list of people who are willing to help you with caregiver support.

Family members, friends and professional respite care workers can give you a break or help out when you can't be there. Include their phone numbers on your list, along with the times they are available and the tasks they're willing (or unwilling) to perform. Always keep a copy of the list with you; you never know when you may need to ask someone for help.

Get organized. Being a caregiver can be a full-time job, even if you already *have* a full-time job. Make a realistic schedule with your family and friends to make sure you get the caregiver support you need; assign chores, and make sure everyone knows what to do and when to do it. This will help everyone stay organized, and it will help you, as primary caregiver, to manage the extra demands on your time.

Schedule time for yourself. Don't forget to schedule time for activities you enjoy. There are more important things than doing the laundry, and caregiver support is one of them.

Remember, this is about staying healthy in mind and body, so you need to make time to have fun now and then.

Make your own health your first priority. This may sound selfish, but it's not. Being a caregiver is a big job, and the only way you can provide the caregiving your loved one needs is to **make sure you stay healthy.**

The kind of stress you're trying to manage every day can easily lead to depression; staying fit and healthy can help you cope, reduce stress, and make it easier to get through tough days when they come.

Following these tips for caregiver support will help you stay on the right track:

- **Eat a balanced diet.** This is vital to good long-term health, and it shouldn't be hard to manage. Chances are the person you're caring for has been ordered to eat well, and you're probably preparing and/or sharing many of those meals.
- **Get plenty of rest.** Try to get the requisite eight hours every night. If you're short on sleep because your caregiver duties require you to be up and down during the night, take naps the following day when your loved one is sleeping.
- **Exercise regularly.** Aim for 30-60 minutes of exercise four to six times a week; even a walk around the block will help clear your mind and keep you more fit. Regular exercise will give you more energy, reduce your stress, and elevate your mood. If you can work in some [strength training](#) twice a week, that will help keep your bones firm and your muscles strong, both essential if you have to help lift and support the person in your care. For a list of exercises you can do at home, see [Basic Exercise Series](#).
- **Relax.** Do relaxation exercises--such as deep breathing or meditating--to reduce caregiver stress. If possible, set aside a few minutes at the beginning and end of your day to practice these techniques. Consciously relaxing in this way will help you enter the day more calmly, and make it easier for you to sleep at night. You can also do deep breathing now and then throughout the day to help keep your stress under control.
- **Take a break.** At least once or twice each week, stop being a caregiver for awhile and take some time for yourself. If you do, you'll be happier and better able to care for your loved one.
- **See your doctor.** Get regular medical check-ups; you need them more than ever now, because you're managing a lot of extra stress and emotional turmoil.

Being a caregiver for someone you love is one of the toughest jobs imaginable. It's frustrating and terrifying, exhausting and overwhelming, but it can be one of the most rewarding things you'll ever do — a supreme act of love. But don't forget caregiver support: in order to provide the best care for your loved one, you have to take care of yourself.