

Proactive Planning for Self-Care

Caregiving is hard work and taking care of yourself will ensure you to be a successful caregiver. Feeling rundown and stressed can make you a less effective caregiver. Self-care doesn't mean scheduling spa treatments every week (although if you can, that is certainly worthwhile!). Self-care can mean eating nutritious meals, putting sleep at the top of your list, and enjoying some time away from caregiving duties. Most caregivers may find it hard to make time for themselves, but it is an integral part of caregiving. Prioritizing your own needs is not easy, but even a few minutes a day is a good start.

- **What Is Self-Care?**

- ♦ Self-care means paying careful attention to your diet, exercise, sleep, and social relationships. In the whirlwind of caregiving, these needs are easily overlooked, downplayed, or even ignored. But you cannot be an effective caregiver unless you take care of yourself and tend to your own needs. Keep your own doctors' appointments and get any health concerns treated quickly.
- ♦ Taking care of yourself also means asking for or getting help when you need it. You should not do this job all on your own. Connect with your Senior Care Advisor to discuss creative ways to find support for yourself.

- **Why Is Self-Care Important?**

- ♦ Taking care of yourself can provide you protection from caregiver burnout. Caregiving is hard work, both physically and emotionally, and can be draining. Many caregivers experience depression or declining physical health after years of caregiving. According to the [Family Caregiver Alliance](#), 40 to 70 percent of caregivers have clinically significant symptoms of depression and 63 percent report finding their situation moderately to highly stressful. There are many resources to support you if you are experiencing these emotions; speak with your Senior Care Advisor to discuss what resources might be a good fit. Taking care of your own needs can help you regain some of your balance and be fully present when you are in a caregiving role.
- ♦ Caregiving often comes with unexpected stressors or changes; proactively tending to your own physical and emotional needs will allow you to be more prepared to handle these stressors.

- **What Kinds of Self-Care Work Best?**

- ♦ The best way to take care of yourself is to do the things you enjoy and make your health a priority. Your needs are unique, so what works for another caregiver might not work for you.
- ♦ Get into the habit of recognizing what makes you feel happy, relaxed, or recharged. Is it something active like taking a walk or gardening? Do you prefer to escape in a book or a movie? Or do you relish in catching up with friends over lunch or even a phone call? If you're not sure where to begin, think of what you used to do before you became a caregiver and start there.
- ♦ Recognize your limits and take a break. Are you feeling frustrated with your routine or are you getting sick all the time? Pay attention to what your body and mind are telling you.

- **How Can I Take the Time?**

- ♦ Caregivers have very little free time, so you have to be deliberate in making time for yourself. Work with a caregiving team so you have consistent, reliable time off (every week is ideal). Family, friends, members of your faith community, or hired respite care workers can all provide you with much needed time off.

- ♦ Many caregivers feel guilty about taking time for themselves. Time for yourself is a necessary part of being the best caregiver you can be. It does not mean you are an ineffective or uncommitted caregiver.
- ♦ Plan ahead or it will not happen. Write your self-care plans in your calendar. Perhaps you schedule time to stretch for 10 minutes or to treat yourself to 30 minutes of a funny sitcom. Make a favorite dinner or pick up something healthy that you don't have to cook. The idea is to just remind yourself that your health and well-being are an essential element of the caregiving relationship and you need care, too.