



How Should I Care for Myself, as a Caregiver?

As a caregiver, you have a higher risk for health and emotional problems. That's because caregivers are less likely to attend to their own health by eating a healthy diet, getting physical activity and treating physical and emotional problems. It may feel like your first responsibility is to your loved one, but it's really to yourself. Learn to organize your duties as a caregiver. Find the time to take care of your own health. It will help you do a better job for your loved one.



Tips for Caregiver Success

The National Family Caregivers Association offers these 10 tips for family caregivers.

1. Choose to take charge of your life, and don't let your loved one's condition always take center stage.
2. Remember to be good to yourself. Love, honor and value yourself. You're doing a very hard job and you deserve some quality time, just for you.
3. Watch out for signs of depression and don't delay in getting professional help when you need it.
4. When people offer to help, accept the offer and suggest specific things they can do.
5. Educate yourself about your loved one's condition. Information is empowering.
6. There's a difference between caring and doing. Be open to new technologies and ideas that promote your loved one's independence and help you do your job easier.

7. Trust your instincts. Most of the time they'll lead you in the right direction.
8. Grieve for your losses and then allow yourself to dream new dreams.
9. Stand up for your rights as a caregiver and as a citizen.
10. Seek support from other caregivers. There is great strength in knowing that you are not alone.

How do I care for my physical health?

- **Be physically active.** Moderately-intense physical activities, like brisk walking, for 150 minutes a week can have great benefits for both you and your loved one.
- **Eat a diet low in saturated and trans fats, sodium (salt) and added sugars.** Chances are your loved one has been told to follow a healthier diet or to lose weight. Why not make it easier and adopt the same diet for your whole family?

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- **Schedule regular checkups with your doctor.** A checkup can identify problems such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol and depression. Early detection helps prevent serious problems.
- **Learn to cope with stress.** When you're really tense and uptight, try this deep-breathing exercise for short-term relief. Slowly inhale as deeply as you can. Hold your breath for a few seconds and slowly exhale. Repeat three to five times.

How do I care for my emotional health?

Caregiving can have a great emotional impact. It's important to learn the signs of depression and get help if you experience several of these symptoms for two weeks or more.

- Depressed mood
- Marked loss of interest or pleasure
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Change in appetite or weight
- Loss of energy
- Sleeping too much or too little



Even a 15-minute walk can provide great benefits to your physical health.

- Lack of interest in sex or personal hygiene
- Anxiety
- Tearfulness
- Agitation or restlessness
- Inability to concentrate or make decisions
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Frustration or anger

Depression can often be treated with medication. If you need help dealing with your emotions, seek out a support group, counselor or physician.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call **1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721), or visit **heart.org** to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up to get *Heart Insight*, a free magazine for heart patients and their families, at **heartinsight.org**.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at **heart.org/supportnetwork**.

Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

Can you recommend a counselor who will understand my needs as a caregiver and help me cope?

My Questions:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit **heart.org/answersbyheart** to learn more.