



TOPIC: Insights and Discussion on Self-Care

Mayo Clinic

Signs of caregiver stress

As a caregiver, you may be so focused on your loved one that you don't see how caregiving affects your own health and well-being. The signs of caregiver stress include:

- Feeling burdened or worrying all the time.
- Feeling tired often.
- Sleeping too much or not enough.
- Gaining or losing weight.
- Becoming easily irked or angry.
- Losing interest in activities you used to enjoy.
- Feeling sad.
- Having frequent headaches or other pains or health problems.
- Misusing alcohol or drugs, including prescription medicines.
- Missing your own medical appointments.

To help manage caregiver stress:

- **Ask for and accept help.** Make a list of ways in which others can help you. Then let them choose how to help. Ideas include taking regular walks with the person you care for, cooking a meal for you and helping with medical appointments.
- **Focus on what you can do.** At times, you might feel like you're not doing enough. But no one is a perfect caregiver. Believe that you're doing the best you can.

- **Set goals you can reach.** Break large tasks into smaller steps that you can do one at a time. Make lists of what's most important. Follow a daily routine. Say no to requests that are draining, such as hosting meals for holidays or other occasions.
- **Get connected.** Learn about caregiving resources in your area. There might be classes you can take. You might find caregiving services such as rides, meal delivery or house cleaning.
- **Join a support group.** People in support groups know what you're dealing with. They can cheer you on and help you solve problems. A support group also can be a place to make new friends.
- **Seek social support.** Stay connected to family and friends who support you. Make time each week to visit with someone, even if it's just a walk or a quick cup of coffee.
- **Take care of your health.** Find ways to sleep better. Move more on most days. Eat a healthy diet. Drink plenty of water. Many caregivers have trouble sleeping. Good sleep is important for health. If you have trouble getting a good night's sleep, talk to your health care professional.
- **See your health care professional.** Get the vaccines you need and regular health screenings. Tell your health care professional that you're a caregiver. Talk about worries or symptoms you have.

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Ways to care for yourself if you are a caregiver

1. Self-compassion is essential to self-care.

Being kind to yourself builds the foundation to self-care. Self-compassion means giving yourself credit for the tough, complex work of caregiving, stepping away from the self-critical, harsh inner voice, and allowing yourself time — even if it's just a few minutes a day — to take care of yourself.

Lack of time or energy can make getting that time away particularly challenging. You may even feel guilty or selfish for paying attention to your own needs. What you need to know is this: in fact, practicing self-care allows the caregiver to remain more balanced, focused, and effective, which helps everyone involved.

2. Practice simple breath awareness for 10 minutes a day.

One of the simplest deep relaxation techniques is breath awareness.

3. Make eating well and getting quality sleep priorities.

It's easy to forget about your own meals and needs when trying to help others. Maintaining adequate sleep and nutrition are key to preventing caregiver burnout. Build a daily 10-minute nighttime routine to achieve more restful sleep. Your nighttime routine can include your breathing exercises, meditation, or yoga poses. Missing meals can lead to irritability and fatigue, so it is important to eat regularly scheduled meals throughout the day.

Nutrition can also be an important factor to prevent burnout. Chronic stress has been linked to increased inflammation in the body, so it is helpful to avoid foods that are processed or high in refined sugars, which increase inflammation in the body. Avoid or reduce alcohol, since alcohol both increases inflammation in the body and disrupts quality of sleep.

5. Remain socially connected. Find support through local caregiver support groups.

While it can be difficult to keep social appointments with friends and family in the face of medical caretaking, it is important to maintain social connections to feel less isolated and prevent burnout.

Realizing that you're not alone and that others are going through similar experiences nurtures your ability to be self-compassionate. Hospitals and local organizations often offer caregiver support groups for family and caregivers.

National Institutes of Health

- **Be active.** Find something active that you enjoy. That might be walking, dancing, gardening, or playing with a pet. Even short periods of exercise can be beneficial.
- **Eat well.** Work on having a well-balanced diet that includes a variety of healthy foods. Drink plenty of water every day.
- **Prioritize sleep.** Aim to get seven to nine hours of sleep each night. Develop a relaxing bedtime routine to make it easier to fall asleep. Try to go to sleep and get up at the same time each day.

- **Reduce stress.** Experiment with relaxation techniques like meditation, tai chi, or yoga. Download a smartphone app with guided meditations or relaxing music. Many of these apps are free.
- **Make time to relax.** Carve out time each week to do something you enjoy that has nothing to do with caregiving. It can be as simple as watching a favorite TV show, reading a magazine, or working on a hobby.
- **Keep up with your own health.** Make that doctor's appointment you've been putting off. Tell your doctor that you're a caregiver: They may be able to suggest resources online or in your community.
- **Reach out for support.** Talk to a trusted family member or friend or seek counseling from a mental health professional. Join an online or in-person support group for caregivers. These are people who will know what you're going through and may have suggestions or advice.
- **Take a break if you need it.** Ask another family member or friend to step in, hire an aide to come for a few hours a week, or sign up the older person for an adult day care program.
- **Be kind to yourself.** You don't have to pretend to be cheerful all the time. Feelings of sadness, frustration, and guilt are normal and understandable. Express your feelings by writing in a journal or talking with a friend.