



When Caregivers Forget to Take Care

“I’ll try to hold my breath ... just until we get through this next transition” ... “If I just push a little further, I can rest later” --- but later never comes. If you provide care for a friend or family member, these strategies sound all too familiar.

The amount and cost of the informal caregiving being provided today to elder Americans is staggering. AARP and the National Alliance for Caregiving conducted a survey in 1996 that showed almost 6 million households were providing 20 to 40 or more hours a week of unpaid, informal assistance to older relatives. This included transportation, grocery shopping, household chores, helping with medications and preparing meals. This *same* care would have cost our nation \$45 to \$75 billion a year if these needs were met by hired home care staff. Furthermore, it is probably safe to assume these numbers have increased, rather than decreased, today.

Unfortunately, according to the Family Caregiver Alliance, caregivers are less likely than noncaregivers to get enough sleep, eat healthy, exercise, stay in bed when sick or keep up with their own medical appointments.

If you are one of the generous individuals giving of your time, money and energy to care for an older relative, but find yourself pushing your needle past empty on a regular basis, consider the effects of your priorities. When caregivers neglect their own needs, the result is often two people in need of help, rather than just the one initial care recipient. If your motivation is to provide the very best care, remember that keeping yourself physically and emotionally strong is a responsible and loving choice. You are the conduit of care -- keep the lines in good shape.

5 Ways Self-Care Promotes Better Care of Others

If you are a caregiver:

1. Care recipients often reflect the stress of their caregivers. *Caring for the Caregiver*, a publication sponsored by Parke-Davis, suggests organizing routine respite into your

schedule. This will help you feel balanced and reduce stress overall, rather than waiting until you are overwhelmed, and creating a crisis for you and the person you are caring for.

2. Time you spend in meditation or prayer at your place of worship will help you remember why you have made the commitment to provide care, and how much of the result is out of your control. Your job is to be the best possible companion on the journey.
3. Exercise helps protect you from injury, especially when the care recipient needs physical help such as assistance transferring to and from a wheelchair.
4. The Family Caregiver Alliance suggests preparing a list of things that need doing. This makes it easier to delegate when someone offers help. By letting others help, you are providing a web of support rather than a single lifeline.
5. Joining a support group to vent feelings can also connect you to information and resources about your care recipient's condition. This kind of information helps you anticipate certain needs and ask better questions of medical professionals.

For more information visit:

- Family Caregiver Alliance
National Center on Caregiving
800.445.8106
www.caregiver.org
- National Family Caregivers Association
www.nfcacares.org

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