

# How Caregivers Can Make Time for Self-Care Essentials

16th February, 2019

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Life is full of ups and downs, rewards, and challenges. Being a caregiver for someone you love is a life experience that can be rewarding, but it comes with challenges, too. If you're new to this role, you're probably feeling a little overwhelmed and wondering how you're going to make it all work. To start with, the best thing you can do for yourself now is prioritize self-care. It isn't easy adding one more task to your busy life, but these are self-care essentials that you need as a caregiver so that your own health doesn't suffer.

## Do Something Just for You

As a caregiver, so much of what you do is for someone else, but you don't want to put yourself on the backburner. The trick is to be creative about fitting quick pick-me-ups into your busy schedule. One of the best things you can do, for your physical and mental health, is short bursts of exercise. People who are really busy sometimes think that exercise is something they don't have time for because it takes so long to get to the gym. Instead of feeling like you need to work out for an hour or more, try doing some short at-home exercises that are easy to do with the help of technology, such as exercise videos on YouTube, fitness apps for your mobile device, or playing Wii games.

Caring for yourself can also be as simple as taking a single minute to relax and breathe. Try these tips from Mind Body Green to fit self-care into whatever amount of time you have. If all you have is a minute, breathe mindfully, take a break to stretch or dance, or say positive affirmations. If you have a little longer, make a cup of tea or call someone close to you. Staying connected with friends and family is a vital coping strategy for caregivers, and all it takes is a quick text or phone call to keep that communication open. If you still need a little extra help with taking time for yourself, these apps will help you stay on track.

## Build a Support System

Building a support system is a key self-care strategy that takes more than the occasional phone call to friends. Maintaining those connections is a great start, but it's also good to have the support of other people who are in a similar situation. Consider finding a caregiver support group, either online or one that

meets in person. Connecting with others who have been there will help you feel understood, and you may also find some great advice.

Even if you're the primary caregiver for your loved one, it's perfectly okay (and necessary at times) to ask for help. Being a caregiver can take a toll on you both physically and emotionally. You shouldn't have to do it all on your own, and if you try, you may end up experiencing symptoms of burnout. Besides getting emotional support from friends, they can also be a great resource for lightening your load. If your care giving duties make it hard to keep up with tasks like errands, ask a good friend to help out with these little things.

## **Give Yourself a Break**

Another essential way to care for yourself is to take a break from care giving on occasion. Even if you are a primary caregiver, there are services that can help when you need it, such as adult day services or respite care.

Give yourself a break emotionally, too. The Home Care Assistance blog recommends setting realistic goals and avoiding negative self-talk. Don't be hard on yourself for anything you aren't able to do or for feeling a certain way. It's important to acknowledge that your feelings are normal and perfectly acceptable. The goal of these strategies is to keep your mind in the right place so you're better able to cope with everything that's going on. Pushing your feelings and your own needs aside will only compound your burden. Care giving can be a challenge, which is exactly why these self-care tips are more important now than ever.