

Confident Caregiving: Strategies That Can Help You Along the Way

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Self-care for Caregivers

The good news

- Caregivers often feel pride, a sense of purpose, and other benefits from their caregiving activities.
- Population based studies show that many caregivers:
 - Cope successfully with caregiving
 - Report many psychological benefits from caregiving
 - may even experience improved health and reduced mortality because of their caregiving experience

Self-care for Caregivers

The Not So Good News

- Caregiving strain is associated with:
 - Stage, severity or newness of condition
 - Lack of adequate resources
 - Knowledge
 - Skills specific to the tasks required
 - Coping ability
 - Social support
 - Respite care – individual needs vary tremendously
 - Community services
 - Other demands of life

Stress and coping skills

- Are you worried or stressed
 - Worry is common and can lead us to think and problem solve about the things that concern us.
 - Stress adds a physical reaction to the challenges that we do not feel we have an immediate response to.
 - Heart racing
 - Queasy stomach
 - Cold hands
 - Headaches
- If you do have physical symptoms along with your worries or concerns, it is important to include some type of relaxation technique that "resets" the sympathetic nervous system.

Healthy Lifestyle Factors

- When we are caregivers, it is important to also care for ourselves
- First, attend to physical needs
 - Sleep is perhaps one of the most important and often neglected parts of self-care
 - Healthy diet
 - Exercise
 - Fun activities!

Sleep

- Affects many aspects of mental (cognitive), emotional, physical performance
- Good sleep habits can improve sleep and are under your direct control
 - Behavioral factors
 - Environmental factors
 - Psychological factors
- *Any plan will have to be individualized*
- *Every plan will need time and persistence to take effect*

Sleep hygiene

- Behavioral factors
 - Routine at bedtime
 - Ritual always helpful, more to some than others
 - Prepare for next day
 - Relaxation technique of choice
 - Wake at the same time – under your control (falling asleep is not)
 - Activity level – important, do not exercise before bedtime
 - Napping – avoid if possible, limit to 40 min or less
 - Avoid stimulants within six hours of bedtime
 - Restrict fluids within four hours of bedtime

Sleep Hygiene

- Environmental factors
 - Light, especially blue light (electronic devices)
 - Sound – white noise helpful
 - Temperature – individuals vary
- Psychological factors

When daytime distractions recede, psychological factors may become more pressing

 - Anxiety most common
 - Medical concerns
 - Family concerns
 - Financial concerns
 - Relaxation routine
 - Calms the body as well as the mind
 - Your mind will not remain blank (don't think of a white bear analogy)
 - Gratitude journal

Types of coping skills

Alter, adapt to, accept or avoid challenge

- Task-oriented
 - Anticipatory
 - Prioritizing
 - Organizing
 - Problem solving
 - Changing the situation
 - Changing your behavior
 - Changing your thinking
- Emotion focused
 - Social support
 - Learning to control your reactions, emotions
- Avoidance or distraction
 - Positive in certain circumstances

Task-oriented coping

- Anticipatory
 - Prioritizing
 - See next slide
 - Organizing
 - Time management
 - Routines
 - Learning what resources are available

Value Grid

	Important or Valued	Not important or valued
Urgent		
Not urgent	*****	

Task-oriented coping

- Problem solving
 - Identify the stressor
 - What resources do you have?
 - What resources do you need?
 - Can you change your behavior?
 - For instance, with the current coronavirus –
 - Learn to correctly wash your hands
 - Order groceries online
 - Can you change your thinking?
 - Fact check your thoughts
 - How realistic are they?
 - What can you control?

Emotion-focused coping

- Social support
 - This is one of the greatest buffers against stress
 - “Social distancing” does not mean ***emotional distancing***
 - Learn who is supportive and in what way
 - Someone to talk to
 - For information
 - For fun
 - Someone with practical skills
 - Help with chores
 - Transportation
 - Someone who values you
- Learning to control your emotions

Avoidance-focused coping

- When you do not have control
 - This is not a defeat
 - Saves your energy for solvable problems
- Distraction
 - Adaptive at times as a mental respite
 - Games, puzzles, shows
 - Set limits

Stress

- Stress involves a physiological response in your body
- The sympathetic nervous system engages when you perceive a threat – and it cannot differentiate between a sabertooth tiger or a bill you can't pay or any other stressor
- It prepares you for “Fight or Flight”
- Think about what you need to either fight an enemy or run away
 - Increased heart rate
 - Increased breathing rate
 - More energy – liver breaks down stores
 - Large muscle groups activated

Immediate Stress Relievers

- Sometimes we need a way to immediately relieve stress
- These are examples:
 - Take deep breaths
 - Inhale to a count of 4, hold for 4, exhale for 7
 - Use your abdominal muscles
 - Relax your muscles
 - Use a “body scan” – head to toes
 - Move – go for a walk, gently exercise
 - Ground yourself in the present
 - Do a “sensory scan” – name 3 things you can see, hear, smell, touch
 - Distract yourself – but set a time limit
 - Listen to favorite music, play an engaging game, call a friend

Relaxation strategies

- All relaxation practices involve deep, slow breathing
 - This is under your direct control
 - Learn through an app or a video correct technique
- There are many different practices – find one that you like and practice daily to “reset” your system
 - Meditation
 - Progressive muscle relaxation
 - Chi Gong, others
 - Yoga
 - Guided imagery
 - Repetitive prayer

Relaxation apps

- Breathe2relax
- Virtualhopebox
- Headspace
- Calm
- There are many, many others
- Please find one that suits you

Resilience

- Resilience is the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness; grit. **Psychological resilience** is the ability to mentally or emotionally cope with a crisis and to return to pre-crisis status quickly
- Resilience is a key part of thriving as a caregiver – and this is a skill that can be developed and increased with practice
- Positive psychology has contributed many practices that contribute to resilience

Resilience practices

- Build your connections
 - Social connections are key
 - Prioritize relationships
 - Join groups
- Foster wellness
 - Physical, emotional, mental, spiritual
 - Healthy habits
 - Practice mindfulness
 - Avoid negative outlets
 - Find purpose
- Set goals and anticipate, plan, move forward
- Seek help when needed

Cultivate gratitude

- Gratitude is also a crucial element in living your best life
- Positive experiences are, unfortunately, not given as much weight as negative ones – the ratio is 2:1
 - For every negative experience, you need two positive ones to balance out
 - We are “wired” to pay more attention to negative ones
- Gratitude is associated with better outcomes
 - Physical, emotional, mental
- Practices
 - Keep a gratitude journal - record 3 unique experiences each day
 - Savor positive experiences
 - Dwell on each detail
 - With others – and ask them about their positive experiences
 - Start an email chain about gratitude
 - Write a letter to recognize someone

Practice self-compassion

- **Keep things in perspective.** How you think can play a significant part in how you feel — and how resilient you are when faced with obstacles.
 - If you feel overwhelmed by a challenge, remind yourself that what happened to you isn't an indicator of how your future will go, and that you're not helpless. You may not be able to change a highly stressful event, but you can change how you interpret and respond to it.
- Be proud of your accomplishments