

The Elder Expert

How to Avoid Caregiver Fatigue

By Amy Fuchs



Well-rested, happy caregivers are crucial to the job. But the job of caregiving can be exhausting without proper support in place. So it's important that caregivers balance caring for someone else and caring for themselves. Otherwise, they can experience caregiver fatigue and potentially develop serious health problems.

Caregivers instinctively put their loved one's comfort and happiness above their own, which can create serious repercussions. If caregivers sacrifice their own happiness for the sake of their job, they won't be helpful to the seniors they serve. The American Medical Association describes the role of a caregiver as a potential "occupational hazard." Caregivers face incredible stress and are at risk of psychological and physical problems. Side effects of caregiving include general burnout, fatigue, self-neglect, depression and more.

HAPPY CAREGIVERS CARE FOR THEMSELVES

Here are ten healthy habits to practice to help ensure you do not suffer from caregiver fatigue. Among these, "take care of yourself" is repeated in different forms throughout the list. For a caregiver, that could mean a walk, time to read, a massage or a day off, but taking

care of yourself is essential and should become a part of the caregiver's routine.

1) Nurture your mind and body

Caregivers must replenish themselves physically and mentally. Caregiving is tough and sometimes depressing work, so it is important to recharge through exercise, social activities, fun classes or even meditation.

2) Keep an eye on your health

It is easy to forget yourself when your focus is on others but make sure to have your annual doctor exam and checkup and stay in tune with your own health.

3) Find support

Take time each week to vent to friends or family members. It's healthy. Some caregivers might even consider seeing a therapist to help sort out frustrations or joining a caregiver support group.

4) Eat healthy

A nutritious diet keeps energy levels up and health risks at bay. Seniors need to eat healthy too. So caregivers might think of preparing healthy meals and snacks that incorporate a variety of fruits and vegetables, and enjoying them with their loved one, as a part of the job.

5) Exercise

Staying active physically helps reduce stress and improve mood. It's the ideal way to ward off health issues and diseases that can put a caregiver's job at risk. There is nothing like natural endorphins from exercise to help renew the spirit and combat caregiver fatigue.

6) Meditate

Consider activities that help you relax mentally. Yoga, meditation, deep breathing and music are just some of the ways to help a caregiver slow down and put things into perspective. You might also think about incorporating meditation

into your caregiving routine because your loved one also can benefit.

7) Set personal goals

A class, a new hobby, a vacation, whatever the dream, caregivers should set and write down personal goals that remind them of what they want to achieve outside of their job. Having something to look forward to has a tendency to energize caregivers, give them hope and help them avoid burnout.

8) Keep a journal

Writing down frustrations is a good way to let them go. A journal is also a good place to record what went well for the day. Those words can serve as inspiration the next morning and help you put things in perspective.

9) Be grateful

Caring for a senior brings challenges and stress but also the opportunity to make someone else's life easier and more enjoyable. It could be a last chance to spend time with a loved one. It is important to remember that time is the ultimate gift.

10) Take a day off

Friends and family members or hired health aides should fill in for caregivers on a regular basis. That way they can focus on themselves and their goals. This time is for caregivers to do what they like to do, not run job-related errands.

With a little care and planning, you can beat caregiver fatigue. Happy caregivers practice good habits in daily life.



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