

Caring for Incontinent People – Caring for Yourself

An important part of caregiving is properly caring for yourself. Staying active, motivated, healthy, connected with friends, and interested in activities should be central to your life.

In order to do a good job caring for someone else, you must first take care of yourself. Don't ignore your own needs and feelings. Coordinating doctors' appointments, dispensing medications, bathing, lifting, transferring, dressing, feeding, toileting and dealing with incontinence-related activities may not leave you with much time, but your physical and emotional health is of tremendous importance. By caring for yourself, both physically and emotionally, you will be a better care provider.

Normal Emotions

Everyone's response to their unique caregiving situation is different. Perhaps you are a part-time caregiver who provides periodic help or maybe you are providing around-the-clock full-time care. Maybe you receive support from other family members or you are travelling this road alone.

Many caregivers say they are torn between love, a sense of satisfaction about the care they are providing, and resentment because caregiving responsibilities tend to limit outside activities. These conflicting emotions are a normal part of caregiving, but may lead to feelings of guilt and stress or physical and emotional burnout. Becoming a caregiver is a profound lifestyle change. It takes time to adjust to a new routine and added responsibilities. Give yourself credit for a job well done, but also give yourself a break once in a while.

Combating Burnout

Arrange for time off from caregiving. Taking time off means making arrangements, but it is worth the time and effort. Consider these options:

Help From Family

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Sit down with family members and have them commit to:

- specific chores
- specific times they can help
- specific days they can help

Try to get commitments in writing. You need to know exactly what kind of help you can expect. When commitments are vague, misunderstandings are likely. Schedule a family meeting from time to time to help other family members understand the situation and to involve them in caregiving.

If family members are not able to physically help with care, suggest they contribute to paying for respite care, a person to cook and clean, or an aide to help your loved one bathe, eat, dress, use the bathroom or get around the house.

Help From Friends

Accept help from friends. Keep a current list of errands and chores that need to be done. The list may include:

- running an errand – mailing bills, grocery shopping, buying stamps, dropping off dry cleaning etc
- cooking a meal
- light housekeeping
- mowing the lawn
- raking leaves

Whenever a relative or friend says "just let me know how I can help," get out the list and share it with them. True friends like to know their efforts are helping.

Respite Care

Respite care gives caregivers a rest from the responsibilities of caregiving. Respite care gives you the opportunity to attend a support group, go to lunch with friends, see a movie or enjoy some time alone. Private caregivers can be hired to come into the home for a few hours to a full day.

If you need to get away for a longer period of time, check with local nursing homes or community residential facilities to see if they offer limited stay admissions ranging from a few days to several weeks.

Home Healthcare Organisations

If the person you are caring for still lives in their own home, but needs you for daily help with medications or meals, consider a home health aide or companion to occasionally fill in for you.

Adult Day Care

Adult day care may be an option. It gives your care recipient a chance to socialise with others and have a change of environment while temporarily relieving you of your responsibilities. Many centres offer transportation, group activities, and meals or snacks. Visit the centres in your area to decide which one you like best.

Other Types of Help to Consider

- Use "Meals on Wheels" meal delivery services. Contact your local home health care agency to learn about the meal programs available in your area. Often, however, these services are staffed by volunteers and do not serve and deliver meals every day.
- Use a pharmacy that offers free delivery.

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- Your church or synagogue may have volunteers who can drive patients to the doctor for treatment or come and give you a hand in your home.
- Your local high school or community college may have programs designed to give credit to students who want to learn about caring for sick, disabled and/or the elderly as part of their studies.

Join a Support Group in Your Area

Meet other caregivers and share your feelings with people experiencing a similar situation. Participating in a support group relieves stress, allows you to exchange experiences, and improves your caregiving skills. Sharing coping strategies in a group setting helps others while helping yourself.

Stay Healthy

Your health affects all areas of your life and your ability to cope with caregiving duties. Taking care of yourself is important and involves:

- Watching for signs of depression
- Grieving for your losses and dreaming new dreams
- Getting out and exercising at least once a week
- Eating three well balanced meals every day
- Getting at least seven to nine restful hours of sleep each night
- Talking with or visiting up to three friends or relatives on a regular basis
- Keeping annual medical and dental appointments
- Learning to express your feelings to family members, friends or professionals
- Avoiding destructive behaviours such as overeating, drinking too much, smoking or using drugs