



# *Helping Handbooks*

Taking care of  
yourself while  
taking care of a  
loved one who's  
in a nursing home

With most jobs, you get some time off each week, and vacation time and holidays each year. Time off allows people to relax and refresh, then can come back and do their jobs with more energy, focus and enthusiasm. Caregivers are seldom given holidays or vacation days.



### **Take time off**

Caregivers definitely need time off. Since no one is likely to offer you vacation from your work as a caregiver, you need to arrange for them. Perhaps you will need to ask others to provide some of the care in your absence. (Pay for help if you can and need to).

*Paul, a devoted grandson, felt bad about leaving his grandmother while he took advantage of an opportunity to travel abroad. He asked the visiting committee of his church to find someone to visit his grandmother in the nursing home while he was away. Church members visited and reminded the grandmother that her grandson had not forgotten her and that he would be back. When Paul returned, he spent many pleasant visits sharing pictures and memories of his trip. Some church members*

*continued to visit even after Paul came back. So his grandmother's life became fuller because the grandson took some time away.*

## **Care for your physical and emotional health**

The stress of taking care of a loved one may make you more likely than others your age to suffer from physical and emotional health problems. You may get so busy taking your loved one to medical appointments that you neglect your own check-ups or health screening appointments.

In an airplane, they tell you to put on your own oxygen mask during an emergency before trying to help someone else. Without taking care of yourself you may be unable to help others.

Be aware of your own emotional health. It can affect your physical well being and ability to be a caregiver.

Be aware of signs of depression, such as:

- Not enjoying usual activities
- Tearfulness
- Changes in sleep or appetite
- Lack of energy
- Difficulty with attention and concentration

If you think you may be depressed, talking with your family doctor is a good place to start to get help.

One way to boost your resistance to depression is to make time for things you enjoy.

## **Increase your pleasant events**

Write a list of things you enjoy. Try to include

- Indoor and outdoor activities
- Things that don't cost money as well as things that do
- Things to do alone as well as things to do with others
- Do something on the list at least once every 36 hours.

Another way to protect yourself from depression is to give yourself credit for all you do.

## **Give yourself recognition**

Because of the nature of the illness, people with memory loss often don't recognize or appreciate the help others provide, and are likely to not express thanks. So caregivers need to give themselves credit appreciation for the help they provide.

Tammi found it helpful to look at herself in the mirror and tell herself all the things she did to help her mom, then literally reach back and pat herself on the back.

Another way to protect your mental health is to talk to someone who knows about, and understands, the stresses of caregiving.

Support groups with other people who are in similar situations can be a good place to share what you're going through. Check with social workers at a local hospital, or at the facility where your loved one lives to find out whether a support group is available.

Very often, close human relationships involve mixed feelings. It's sometimes helpful to talk to a friend, religious leader or professional counselor about issues from the past that are on your mind, as well as about the stress of trying to help a person with memory loss.

### **Family matters**

It seems to be a fact of life that, in most families, one person ends up providing most of the care for frail relatives.

If you seem to be doing more than your share, tell others how you feel. Rather than blaming them for not doing more, ask other family members or friends to do certain tasks.

"I feel tired and overwhelmed by all the help I'm giving mom. Can you do the laundry for her next week?"

Be willing to accept help from others, even though they

don't provide care for your loved one the way you do.

Someone outside the family, such as a professional counselor or social worker, can help everyone negotiate a schedule or distribution of tasks, so all the responsibilities do not fall on one person's shoulders. Talk about where things might go wrong and work out a backup plan. Schedule a follow-up session to see that things are going according to plan and make changes as needed.

### **Do not neglect your spiritual life**

Spiritual resources can be a source of strength during life's trials. Take time to attend religious services, meditate or pray, listen to religious programs on television or radio, and talk with leaders and members of your religious community.

Do not hesitate to turn to your religious community for both spiritual and practical help.

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