

# e-Health: Self-care for caregivers

## Are you a caregiver?

If your work involves caring for others, you probably already know caregiving can be tough. But many people who act as unpaid or informal caregivers for a family member or friend don't even think of themselves that way. It's just what they do because someone close to them needs their help.

If you're helping someone with activities of daily living such as bathing, dressing, grooming, eating, walking, taking medications or other personal care, that makes you a caregiver. And caregivers may need to pay extra attention to their own wellbeing.

## What does self-care look like?

Self-care can be different for everyone. One part of it includes making sure your needs are getting met day to day and week to week. And that often takes "me" time.

How can I get more time for myself?

To create more "me" time, you can:

- Be sure you're not doing things for others that they can do on their own
- Get help with housekeeping or other tasks as needed
- Look for easier ways to complete caregiving tasks such as:
  - Getting prescriptions delivered instead of going to the pharmacy
  - Using a weekly or monthly pill organizer
  - Making a lot of food at once and freezing the leftovers
  - Asking for help from others you trust

## What would I even do with more "me" time?

Some things you can do with "me" time to help you feel refreshed may include:

- Exercising
- Enjoying a favorite meal
- Engaging in a hobby
- Taking care of your own health
- Getting enough sleep

## Adapting to change

Another part of self-care involves adapting to change. Chronic stress leaves caregivers at a greater risk for depression and substance misuse.<sup>1</sup> They're also likely to experience negative feelings at times such as grief and loss, guilt, anger, fear, inadequacy and resentment. They may also feel ashamed of having negative thoughts and feelings at all.

Some things you can do to lower your risk include eating a healthy diet and getting 20 minutes of moderate exercise each day.<sup>1</sup> Respond to negative feelings by reminding yourself that while you may not be able to cure or fix everything, the caregiving you provide makes a big difference.

## Reaching out for support

Professional counseling, support groups and consulting a financial professional can also help you find meaning in what you're going through and keep your stress level from getting out of control. A counselor, the care recipient's health care team or a geriatric care manager may also be able to help you make decisions about whether or when to consider assisted living or nursing home options.

Being a caregiver can be hard. It may take a lot of time and patience, and you might feel selfish for taking some time back for you. But remember: Taking good care of yourself can help you feel better and stress less. Good self-care helps you feel more balanced and energized. It all adds up to being a better caregiver, which isn't selfish at all!

*\*Visual cue: <sup>1</sup>Why Caregiving Can Lead to Depression. Available at: WebMD.com. Accessed on April 16, 2020.*

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