

The Ultimate Guide to Self-Care

Helping Caregivers Prevent Burnout



HOME CARE
ASSISTANCE

The Go-To Guide to Help Caregivers Prevent Burnout

Caregiving can be an experience that brings you and your loved one closer together. Whether you're caring for a parent, spouse, or friend your relationship will grow and change. However, the stress that comes with caregiving can take a toll on your own health, especially if you are the sole caregiver. Don't let burnout negatively affect your life or your bond with your loved one. Whether you're trying to sleep better, exercise more, or change your mindset, we're here to help you set yourself up for success.

If you're feeling overwhelmed by caregiving responsibilities:

Do you find that all of your time, energy and resources are going towards supporting a loved one? Learn how taking time for self-care can make you better equipped to handle the many responsibilities thrown your way.

If you're trying to reduce caregiver stress:

This eBook provides you with the tools you need to minimize daily stressors through minor lifestyle changes and mindset shifts.

If you're looking to prevent caregiver burnout:


As stress builds, you risk facing burnout and no longer feeling capable of providing care to your loved one. Avoid burnout by using our simple self-care strategies provided in this guide. In doing so you will protect your health and continue to provide the best care possible to your aging loved one.

If you're feeling guilty taking time for yourself:

Who says you have to leave your loved one to practice self-care? This eBook includes ways you can promote your own health and wellbeing while with your loved one. Try some together if their interests and abilities will allow for it!

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The **Five** Leading Signs of Caregiver Burnout

By Ashley Krollenbrock

Caregiver burnout is more common than you may think and should be taken seriously. It can impact your health, your happiness, and your relationship with your loved one.

Caregiver burnout has a few main causes:

- **Caregivers are busy.** Many caregivers are also parents and employees, so they're always jumping from task to task.
- **Caregivers are always on duty.** Caregivers who live with their loved one are always waiting for the next task or request. This makes it difficult to relax.
- **Caregivers are lonely.** Many caregivers express feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Here are the signs of caregiver burnout and steps you can take to prevent it from even starting.

What are the Signs of Burnout?

Caregiver Burnout Sign #1: You're less patient with your loved one.

If you're experiencing burnout, your temper might flare more often. This is especially true if you're the sole caregiver. When you're around your loved one all the time, you're always on duty. You can never fully relax because you're waiting for the next task or request. Over time, this might make you short-tempered.

Being impatient with your loved one may cause you to feel guilty or inadequate. It may strain your relationship with your loved one and they may start to feel like a burden.

Here are some steps to overcome this sign of caregiver burnout:

- **Recognize that this is burnout.** You might not even notice this as a sign of burnout at first. You may just feel like your loved one is being extra demanding or unappreciative.
- **Let your loved one know.** If you have strong and open communication with your loved one then they can support you. You might say, "Hey, Mom, I'm feeling overwhelmed this week so I'm going to bed early tonight. Is there anything you need before I do? I'm hoping not to get up again once I'm in bed." Most of the time, our loved ones do want to support us, we just need to show them how.
- **Set healthy boundaries.** If you're clear about your needs, you're less likely to lash out because you've set healthy boundaries.
- **Consider respite care.** If your loved one has a hard time respecting boundaries, having someone else take care of them can give you the space you need. Respite providers can be friends, family members, or paid caregivers.

Caregiver Burnout Sign #2: You have a strained relationship with your family.

Caregivers often feel alone and isolated. Many caregivers wish that their siblings and other family members helped more. Frustration with family members may worsen if you're experiencing burnout. If you're overworked and tired, it can be easy to become resentful.

Every family's situation is different, so you'll need to assess yours. Here are a few common scenarios:

- **Siblings are uncomfortable providing direct care for your parent.** Consider asking for help with things like cooking meals or cleaning.
- **You had a complicated childhood.** Some caregivers find themselves caring for parents despite complicated family histories. If that's the case for you, perhaps your siblings are unable to move past that history in the way you have.
- **Your family lives far away from you.** If so, they may not even realize the extent of the support you provide.

Understanding your family dynamics will help you recognize what the barriers are for getting help.

Caregiver Burnout Sign #3: You're always tired, sick and feeling run-down.

Constant stress can make you tired and weaken your immune system. Between all of your responsibilities, many caregivers feel there isn't enough time to sleep. Even if you're sleeping a lot, you might still feel tired and run-down, especially if you're always busy. For a better night's sleep, use sleep tips like darkening the room and powering down before bed.

Regain some energy by learning how to say no. You don't have to say yes to every request. Don't feel guilty if you don't have

time to bake homemade cupcakes for your child's classroom – store bought is fine. If you're dreading a social engagement, politely decline and use that time to recharge.

On the other hand, make time for activities and events that bring you joy. Leave the dishes in the sink for a night if it means you'll spend the evening catching up with an old friend. Learning how to say no will allow you to say yes to the important things.

Caregiver Burnout Sign #4: You don't make time for your own needs.

If you're experiencing burnout, you may not have the energy to focus on your own needs. Who has time to go to the doctor or cook healthy meals when you barely have time to sleep? This will ultimately cause more harm than good.

If you don't take care of yourself, you may experience long-term impacts on your health. Put reminders in your calendar so you can keep track of your own health, just as you would for your loved one. Spending a little bit of time each month on yourself will go a long way towards protecting your long-term health.

Caregiver Burnout Sign #5: You feel sad and hopeless.

Many caregivers experience depression. Depression is a sign of burnout, especially if you've been feeling overwhelmed for a long time. Depression can be serious, and for many people, professional support can be an enormous help.

Professional help may consist of medication, therapy, support groups for caregivers, or

other types of interventions. If your feelings of hopelessness are frequent or last a long time, seek professional help. You can talk through options with your doctor to find one that works for you.

Learning How to Take Care of Yourself

Caregivers are wonderful at taking care of others but don't always know how to take care of themselves. Protecting yourself from burnout isn't a selfish thing to do. Your loved one doesn't want your wellbeing to suffer because you're taking care of him or her.

Caregiving is about giving your loved one the opportunity to live a rich and fulfilling life. It's about making memories with your loved one that you'll cherish forever. Caregiving is hard work, but there is so much more to it than that. Recognize the signs of burnout and take steps to address them. This will protect your health, wellbeing and relationship with your loved one.





How to **Prevent** Caregiver Stress

By Rick Lauber

It happens and gets shrugged off routinely. Chances are likely that you too will try and sweep it under the carpet. "It" is heightened caregiver stress. This occurs when caregivers focus all their time, attention, energy, and resources towards helping and supporting a loved one but forget to care for themselves. Instead, caregivers must be mindful of their own health and wellbeing.

Why? A caregiver's personal health is just as important as a loved one's health. Without sufficient self-care, caregivers can hurt themselves, become ineffective, and experience poor health or other negative issues. But even though caregiver stress is one of the most common problems caregivers face, there are ways you can manage it.

What is Caregiver Stress?

Caregiver stress results from feeling overwhelmed. As humans, we have our limits on what we can do. Imagine a street performer juggling one too many flaming torches in the air. Caregiver stress is your mind and body's natural response when you are trying to do too much. You can experience caregiver stress physically, mentally, emotionally, and even financially.

Other factors can lead to increased caregiver stress as well. Since caregivers can be on-call around-the-clock, they might try to squeeze in too much, fight to find balance, and watch helplessly as a loved one declines.

15 Ways to Reduce Caregiver Stress

If you have prioritized your loved one, it's time to switch your thinking. Concentrate on yourself as well. Try any – or all – of these recommendations to practice self-care and reduce caregiver stress:

- 1. Find a healthy outlet.** Choose something that helps you relax and recharge. For me, I found writing to be a calming activity. Writing gave me the opportunity to (privately or publicly) vent about what was going on in my life. Walking was another satisfying outlet. By lacing up my hiking boots and going for a brisk stroll outside, I found my own stress level lessened.
- 2. Breathe.** Yes, this is a natural process but be more attentive to your breath. Find a quiet spot, close your eyes, breathe in (deeply) through your nose, and exhale through your mouth. To enhance this experience, try sitting near a garden where you can smell the aroma of fresh flowers.
- 3. Exercise.** Walk on a treadmill, go for a swim, take an aerobics class, ride a stationary bicycle, lift weights, or stretch. Regular exercise works wonders to relieve mounting tension in your body and personal stress.
- 4. Meet with friends.** Reach out to someone you care about and suggest a coffee meeting. Socializing gets you out of the house and provides a pleasant distraction from your caregiving routine. If you can't find time to call, become more active with emailing or texting friends. This way you can send and reply to messages at a time that is convenient for you.
- 5. Listen to music.** Slide a CD into your stereo, tune in to a concert on YouTube, or create your own personal playlist with Spotify. Sing along and even dance! You will feel better and more energized.
- 6. Clean the house.** Turn that negative stress into something positive. Do some laundry, load dirty dishes into the dishwasher, or vacuum. Celebrate the small victories.
- 7. Take a bath.** Soak away stress in the bathtub. For increased enjoyment, add bubbles or Epsom salts to the water. Install a bathtub pillow and a shelf. This shelf rests on the bathtub walls above the water and provides you with a dry spot for a book or a glass of wine. If you have family, remember to post a "Do Not Disturb" sign on the bathroom door!
- 8. Watch comedy.** See a live comedy show, watch a situation-comedy television show, or choose a funny movie at the local theater. Laughing is a natural human response and can be a great stress-buster!

9. **Get a massage.** Look around for a masseuse who you feel comfortable with. I've discovered a local massage school looking for "massage models." Models consent to treatments from massage students looking to gain experience. It's a win-win situation for all! A cheaper alternative would be to use a foam roller or tennis ball. Place the ball on the wall or the floor and roll your sore spots over top of it.
10. **Pursue previously enjoyed hobbies.** What pastime(s) do you remember loving? Caregivers may ignore these and focus on helping their parent instead. Do something you previously enjoyed, give back to yourself, and reduce caregiver stress.
11. **Brew a cup of tea.** Sipping a cup of your favorite herbal flavors can bring you comfort and help reduce caregiver stress. Teas taste and smell wonderful.
12. **Get creative.** If you're like me and choose to write, that's just one creative outlet! Pottery, painting, and piano lessons may be on your list of things to try. Think outside the box and plant a flower or vegetable garden in your back yard. You may not have an urge to create. In this case, visit the local art gallery to appreciate other's work. Join the audience at your local coffee shop supporting local artists.
13. **Get organized.** Make a calendar with a full schedule of your care partner's doctor appointments. Set reminders on your phone or in a day planner with the times that your loved one needs to take medication. Creating a to-do list or checklist each day will help you keep everything in order and dodge the feeling of caregiver stress.
14. **Stay in the moment.** Rather than thinking of the subsequent challenges you'll face in the future, focus on the task at hand. Being present will help prevent negative feelings from creeping up.
15. **Ask for help.** Don't be hesitant to ask for help or feel ashamed to do so. Reach out to friends or family to see if they can help care for your parent or loved one for an afternoon while you get errands done or check something else off this self-care list.

What are the Signs of Caregiver Stress?

Caregivers can experience stress in many ways. The problem can begin with small signals and then build to more major concerns. Do your loved one and yourself a favor and watch for these eight signs of caregiver burnout:

Exhaustion

Being constantly "on the go" can be tiresome. The simple answer would seem to be a good night's sleep. This, however, is often impossible for caregivers to achieve. Regular sleep patterns are critical for people to establish. However, this is challenging for caregivers to achieve since they may go to bed late and rise early. Any sleep experienced by a caregiver can be interrupted by insomnia or your loved one's needs. Alternatively, some caregivers may be



getting too much sleep. When life becomes too much, people can be tempted to stay in bed, hide, and pull the covers over their head. Scientific research reminds us that eight hours of sleep per night is best.

Lack of Appetite

Caregivers may not desire food or mistakenly believe that they do not have the time to prepare a nutritious meal. Proper eating habits are vital for caregivers to get the fuel they need to function. A muffin and coffee in the morning will likely not get you to lunchtime. Try eating fresh fruits with hardboiled eggs instead. Both options offer convenience but the latter offers nutritional value that will keep you going.

Weight Fluctuation

If you find yourself losing or gaining an abnormal amount of weight, you need to evaluate your own nutrition. Skipping meals is common amongst caregivers due to the lack of appetite discussed above. Overeating is another problem caregivers might face when stressed, so large amounts of weight gain should be treated seriously as well.

Headaches

Headaches are a common symptom of caregiver stress. Make sure you stay hydrated. Drinking water – and plenty of it – can help alleviate that headache you've been fighting all afternoon.

Inability to Relax or Focus

As a caregiver, you will often think about your loved one. This is to be expected but not always constructive. Often when I laid in bed at night, my mind was working overtime. I continually dwelled on caregiving matters, remembered things to do over the next

several days, and worried about Mom and Dad – what were they doing now? Were they both alright? Should I check to see if my cell phone is on – again – in the chance of an emergency? With an active mind, it is impossible to relax. Continual distraction can be counterproductive or even dangerous. Imagine yourself losing focus while driving or during a project meeting at work. If you feel your brain going into overdrive, try writing down a list of the things you need to do when you get home or the following day.

Heightened Frustration

Personally, I'm very easy-going, but I found myself getting increasingly annoyed. Two high-problem issues for me were traffic and long line-ups (both situations completely out of my control). When plans are not working, caregivers may lash out in anger at others. In situations like these, try taking a few deep breaths.

Anxiety and Depression

Caregivers may imagine a bleak future and suffer from sadness or depression. They may be focusing on the imminent loss of a loved one or believe there is no help available. Anxiety is also quite common with caregivers. Check in with your doctor if you think you may have anxiety or depression.

Substance Abuse

Caregivers may rely on alcohol, drugs, or even prescription medications to comfort them. Be careful here! These will often do more harm than good for an individual. Finding support groups can be a helpful way to overcome any dependencies that might have formed.

The 3 Stages of Caregiver Stress

Caregiver stress can start small and grow. Gnawing frustrations with the daily routine or others can become a full-scale blowout. Remain calm and focused on the job at hand. Caregivers should remain mindful of these stages of caregiver stress.

- 1. Stress Arousal.** This is when frustration at things, other people, or events begins to build. It is possible that many of these factors are not in your control. It is better to try to accept them or work with them as best as possible. Caregivers experiencing stress arousal may grind their teeth overnight, become more forgetful, and suffer from body pain. Stress arousal must be a priority over the other stages of caregiver stress. A person needs to identify a problem before he or she can solve that problem.
- 2. Burnout.** Here, caregivers hit the proverbial brick wall. Caregiving may have become too much for them to handle. They have done everything possible and cannot proceed. Caregiver burnout may cause caregivers to become listless, procrastinate with completing jobs, and withdraw from their own social contacts.
- 3. Compassion Fatigue.** This occurs when caregivers reach a point of sheer exhaustion and feelings of hopelessness. Caregivers experiencing compassion fatigue can't detach themselves from the care they give their loved one. They tend to experience their loved one's difficulties as their own. When caregivers experience compassion fatigue, they may feel that their efforts are not worth the trouble and may not want to give any more of themselves to the cause. Caregivers may even try to shut off their own compassion.





15 Minutes Alone: **Protecting** Your Own Time

By Rob Wagner

A caregiver's world revolves around unending demands. These demands may drain you emotionally, mentally and physically. But the biggest drag is on your time. How big? For many caregivers, just enjoying 15 minutes alone is an unimaginable luxury.

Developing a Self-Care Strategy

Your dream of 15 minutes alone can become reality. Ask yourself: Do you need to be physically separate from your loved one to practice self-care? Is this even possible? If not, can you take care of yourself while you're in the room with them? Are there options to do it together? Your answers will help you choose the right approach.

15 Minutes for Yourself...While You Care for Another

Can you really take 15 minutes for yourself while in the same room with your mother or father? Surprisingly, the answer is yes.

If you are caring for a parent or spouse, you may get so task-focused that you forget about your own wellbeing. Try these approaches when you are together:

- **Develop a breathing practice.** After all, you need to breathe anyway! There are many possibilities for breath work and you can do these with anyone present.
- **Try mindfulness.** The only requirement for this simple form of meditation is the willingness to sit still and watch your thoughts. Developing a healthy detachment from the challenges of the moment could be just the care you need.
- **Listen to music.** Share the joy of music together or don a pair of headphones and listen while you watch Mom or Dad.
- **Read.** Depending on the situation, you could dip into a novel. Keep reading material or your favorite device handy.
- **Exercise.** If your parent is able, you can do some simple exercises together. If not, bring an exercise mat into the room and perform floor exercises right there.
- **More togetherness ideas.** Other ideas for creating some chill time during care time include jigsaw puzzles, watching TV, or even having “tea time” – a daily ritual you can share with your parent.

Out of Sight but Still On-Site

When you are taking care of someone else, here are seven ways to steal 15 minutes alone in a spare room:

- **Take a power nap.** A short nap will refresh you and won't interfere with your evening sleep. Even if you can't or don't want to fall asleep, you can still rest and collect your thoughts.
- **Do floor exercises.** Stretching, yoga and aerobic exercise can all be performed in a confined space.
- **Talk to a friend.** Can you spend your 15 minutes on the phone with a friend? If you're able to set time to do this in advance, great! If that's not practical, pick up your cell and call someone to share how your day is going.
- **Meditate or pray.** Many caregivers find that a short break to reconnect with their spiritual life can, well, lift their spirits.
- **Take a video vacation.** Go online and find a channel that features relaxing scenes and music.
- **Walk.** Take a few minutes for a brisk stroll. If it's on a city street that's totally fine. But if you have access to a park or a beach, all the better. If the weather and environment is right, you can even try a technique called earthing, which means walking barefoot. Some studies show that walking sans shoes reconnects us to mother earth and satisfies our soul...and soles.
- **Just sit.** Take a seat someplace and drink it all in. That might mean a park bench or a patch of grass or a local coffee shop.



Why **Sleep** is a Caregiver's Secret Weapon

By Gina Roberts-Grey

The emotional strain of caring for an aging loved one and the depression many caregivers experience can contribute to sleep deprivation and trouble sleeping. As many as two-thirds of people caring for someone with dementia have trouble falling—or staying—asleep, according to a study from the University of Washington.

But a healthy sleep routine is critical to staying invigorated for the demands that caregiving requires. It can also help prevent caregiver burnout.

The Benefits of Sleep for Our Brain

A good night's sleep helps your brain "clean up". It flushes out toxins that build up during waking hours. These toxins are believed to possibly lead to the process that is linked to developing Alzheimer's. In order to be the best caregiver you can be, you must look after your own brain health. This is effectively accomplished by ensuring the necessary amount of sleep.

10 Sleep Tips for Caregivers

Here are ten tricks to help improve your sleep and combat trouble sleeping:

- 1. Set a sleep schedule.** And stick to it. Going to bed and waking up at the same time every day helps your body's clock stay on track. This makes you more likely to fall asleep and stay asleep every night.
- 2. Try a new blanket.** A 2015 study published in the *Journal of Sleep Medicine and Disorders* says adults with insomnia slept longer and spent less time awake when using a weighted blanket. These blankets provide a sense of pressure that feels like a hug. This is thought to decrease anxiety, which can leave you tossing and turning.
- 3. Avoid snacking.** It might make your stomach happy but a bedtime snack can mess with your body's ability to sleep soundly. Scientists at the University of Arizona Health Sciences found nighttime snacking can increase the risk of diabetes and obesity. These are also factors associated with trouble sleeping.
- 4. Stream your favorite song.** A 2018 study by the University of Sheffield says listening to music while falling asleep can reduce sleep troubles. There isn't a preferred song to help you get some zzz's. Listen to whatever music you find calming or relaxing.
- 5. Avoid alcohol.** Consuming alcohol before sleeping can make it harder to stay asleep. Instead of a glass of wine or other alcoholic drinks to unwind, try a cup of chamomile tea or another decaffeinated beverage. Data from Loyola University Health System says a decaf drink before bed can promote restful sleep.
- 6. Darken the room.** The Loyola scientists say closing curtains and blinds is more conducive to sleeping than brightly lit rooms. If you're worried about tripping in the middle of the night, use a small green night light in your hall or bathroom. A team of Oxford University researchers found green light leads to the rapid onset of sleep, so you're more likely to slip back into your slumber after going to the bathroom or checking on your loved one.
- 7. Quit smoking.** Smoking tobacco has also been linked to trouble falling or staying asleep. Research found smokers are more likely to wake during the night and wake up too early in the morning.
- 8. Power down.** A 2018 study from the Salk Institute says staring at computer or TV screens before bed can make it hard to fall asleep. Avoid screens for at least one hour before going to bed. This will let your body shift into sleep mode easier once you go to bed. If you wake up in the middle of the night, don't turn on the TV or check your phone. The light from electronics can disrupt your body's sleep clock. This can make it harder to fall back asleep.
- 9. Read a magazine.** A quick and easy bedtime read can help your brain relax and prepare for sleep, says the Loyola data. The scientists say, "lighter content

and shorter articles are ideal.” You can try catching up with entertainment and celebrity-focused magazines or those with positive stories and messages to promote calming and restful sleep.

for possible sleep disorders or patterns that may be easily corrected.

We hope these sleep strategies help you and your loved ones fall and stay asleep.

- 10. Use a sleep diary.** Note your bedtime and wake time, activities (watching TV, eating, etc.) in the 2 to 3 hours before going to sleep. Pay attention to room temperature and any other factors that affect sleep. Be sure to note if you wake during the night (and the number of times) or if your sleep partner reports that you snore. You can review this with your doctor to look





Prayers & Meditations for Caregivers

By Rick Lauber

The alarm clock buzzes and jolts you awake from your already disturbed sleep. You roll over to hit the “snooze” button but can’t doze off again. Your mind is racing with today’s lengthy “to-do” list. Such is the morning routine for many caregivers.

There can be a better way to start the day. By praying or meditating each morning, caregivers may find comfort and direction.

Set the tone for a “better day” and reduce the ever-increasing stress.

Finding a healthy outlet to deal with all of this is better than keeping it bottled up inside of you. Place your written prayer or meditation on your bedside table, tuck it inside the book you’ve promised to finish, tape it to your bathroom mirror, or bookmark it on your smartphone. Your thoughts are personal, so you may want to create your own prayer or meditation. Here are some to get you started.

Christian Prayer for Caregivers

Dear heavenly Father,
Provide the words of comfort I can say.
Provide strength to make it through this day.
I cannot fix things or take control.
I accept this, trust in you, and let it go.
Help me listen and be present
through the grief.
When I grow weary, provide me with relief.
May this experience transcend
this earthly plain.
Help us find greater meaning
beyond just pain.
Heal our wounded places.
Restore us to wholeness.
Provide your peace and loving presence
to guide us and to hold us.
In the name of your Son,
the Great Physician.
Amen

Judaic Prayer for People with Dementia and Their Caregivers

(Excerpt below)

Healing Presence,
do not abandon (name of person)
in her time of need
and great distress,
in this time of transition.
Enfold her and her family
and all those who care for her
under the wings of Shekinah,
Bless them with peace, tranquility, calm
in the midst of the whirlwind
of this terrible illness.

12 Steps for Caregivers, or “The Caregiver’s Prayer”

Although I cannot control the disease process, I need to remember I can
control many aspects of how it affects me and my relative. I need to:
Take care of myself so that I can continue doing the things that are most important.
Simplify my lifestyle so that my time
and energy are available for things
that are really important at this time.
Cultivate the gift of allowing others to help me, because caring for my relative is too
big a job to be done by one person.
Take one day at a time rather
than worry about what may or may not happen in the future.
Structure my day, because a consistent schedule makes life easier for
me and my relative.
Have a sense of humor,
because laughter helps to put things
in a more positive perspective.
Remember that my relative is not being “difficult” on purpose, rather that
his/her behavior and emotions
are distorted by the illness.
Focus on and enjoy what my relative
can still do rather than constantly lament over what is gone.
Increasingly depend upon other
relationships for love and support.
Frequently remind myself that I am doing the best that I can at this very moment.
Draw upon the Higher Power, which I believe is available to me.

Islamic Prayer for Our Parents

Allah care for our parents as they used to care for us, and make us pleasing to you and to them in our manners.
 Allah, Who taught our parents so much love and forgiveness for us, open our hearts to our parents and forgive us whenever we forget or err.
 Amen.

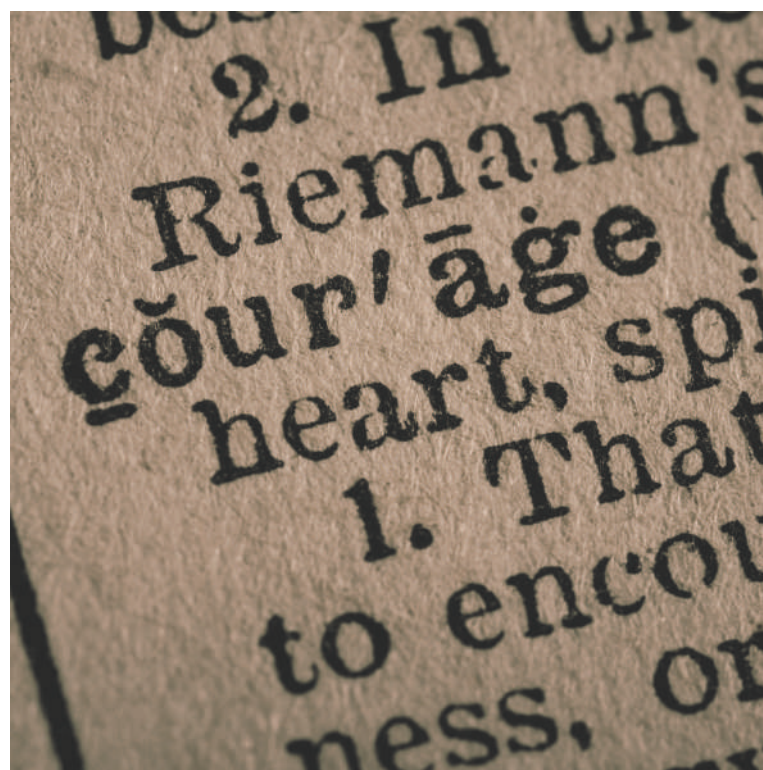
Caregiver's Bill of Rights

I have the right:

1. To take care of myself. Caregiving is not an act of selfishness. It will give me the capability of taking better care of my loved one.
2. To seek help from others even though my loved ones may object. Only I can recognize the limits of my endurance and strength.
3. To maintain facets of my life that do not include the person I care for, just as I would if he or she were healthy. I know that I do everything that I reasonably can for this person, and I have the right to do some things just for myself.
4. To get angry, be depressed, and express other difficult feelings occasionally.
5. To reject any attempts by my loved one (either conscious or unconscious) to manipulate me through guilt, and/or depression.
6. To receive consideration, affection, forgiveness, and acceptance for what I do, from my loved ones, for as long as I offer these qualities in return.

7. To take pride in what I am accomplishing and to applaud the courage it has sometimes taken to meet the needs of my loved one.
8. To protect my individuality and my right to make a life for myself that will sustain me in the time when my loved one no longer needs my full-time help.
9. To expect and demand that as new strides are made in finding resources to aid physically- and mentally-impaired persons in our country, similar strides will be made towards aiding and supporting caregivers.

As a busy and likely overwhelmed caregiver for someone with dementia, praying and/or meditating may help you. Find some words which hold meaning for you and revisit these words as often as needed.





The Health Benefits of **Mindful** Breathing

By Audrey Meinertzhagen

Meditation practitioners for thousands of years have known that befriending one's breath keeps the mind and body healthy. Meditation is also good for living a more peaceful life.

From very practical stress reduction to exploring one's emotions, programs are being developed to meet contemporary problems. During the past thirty years, meditation has

found a place in the secular world. This is thanks to the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn and the development of his Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. MBSR is now available in most communities and can have you meditating in a matter of weeks. This program gives insight into how to respond skillfully to difficult situations. Many hospitals now offer MBSR to support family caregivers who are taking care of loved ones.

The benefits of bringing attention to your breathing are measurable. By learning a few simple breathing techniques, you can:

- Reduce stress levels in your body
- Lower your heart rate
- Lower your blood pressure
- Improve diabetic symptoms
- Reduce depression
- Better manage chronic pain
- Better regulate your body's reaction to stress and fatigue
- Reduce the possibility of burnout for caregivers

8 Breathing Techniques for Heart and Brain Health

There are a vast number of methods and practices that focus on the breath. They all concentrate on various aspects of health and mental wellbeing. While exploring various types of breathwork to meet your specific needs, here are a few techniques and practices to get you started:

1. **Mindful breathing.** This involves becoming aware of your breath and focusing on it. It does not involve trying to change the way you breathe. However, the act of focusing on the breath usually slows down breathing patterns, making you feel more relaxed. As you focus on how air moves in and out through your lungs, mouth and nose, it becomes a form of calming meditation.
2. **Mantra breathing.** This technique makes use of a mantra to help focus on your breath. A mantra is a phrase or word that you repeat to yourself to create focus. As you repeat it, you become able to relax and meditate.
3. **Square breathing.** This employs visualization to create focus. As you inhale, visualize one side of a square. Then, visualize the next side of the square as you exhale. Repeat the process until you have imagined each side of a square.
4. **Nostril breathing.** This technique can help to reduce agitation and anxiety. As you breathe you close off one nostril and take air in slowly through the other. Then switch, closing off the second nostril while breathing through the first. Repeat the process until you begin to feel calmer.
5. **Pranayama breathing.** This cleansing breath method is used in the practice of yoga. Experts say that using pranayama has the power to clean 72,000 channels in the body. It involves inhaling with the mouth closed, then exhaling through the nose. This type of breathing technique can clean blood and clear your respiratory system. As a result, good clean oxygen travels to the heart and the brain.
6. **4,7,8 Method.** Developed by Dr. Andrew Weil, this breathing method helps you get to sleep. It is a simple and straight forward method. You inhale to the count of four, hold your breath to the count of seven, and then exhale to the count of eight. Repeat as needed.
7. **Belly breath.** This type of breathing is easy to practice because you can feel your body taking in and exhaling air by the movement of your abdomen. Lie down on a bed or on the floor. Place one hand on your stomach and inhale slowly through the nose (notice the abdomen rising). As you exhale, you contract the abdomen muscles and push the air out of your lungs.
8. **The Wim Hof Method.** This is a colorful and vibrant health perspective that is being validated by scientific studies. Wim

Hof has developed a deep breathing practice that invigorates the nervous system. The goal is to reduce shallow breathing because it causes the body to oxidize and acidify. His technique takes a few minutes each day and has many positive outcomes for those who try it. You can tap into your body's immune system and reset it. It's worth checking out for those who are feeling adventurous.

3 Brain-Healthy Breathing Exercises

These breathing techniques can promote a healthier heart and brain. Here are three exercises that are easy to practice, anywhere and anytime. Think about using these techniques in your daily routine!

1. Start your day with morning breathing.

This is a great exercise to relieve stiff muscles and clear your respiratory tract when you get up in the morning.

- Stand up and bend forward from the waist. Keep the knees slightly bent. Let your arms dangle loosely to the floor.
- Inhale slowly and deeply.
- Roll your body up slowly, lifting your abdomen, chest, and shoulders before your head. Do not stand up quickly with your head first.
- Once you are in a full standing position, hold your breath.
- As you begin to bend forward again, exhale slowly. Repeat this several times to loosen your body.

2. Renew your energy midday with the stimulating breathing technique.

This exercise is used in yoga. It can increase your energy and help you to feel more alert.

- Keep your mouth closed, then inhale and exhale rapidly through your nose. Keep your breaths as short as possible. Don't worry if you make a lot of noise.
- Try to breath in and out in rapid succession three times in one second. This makes the diaphragm work hard. After each set of three, breathe normally.
- Be careful and do this exercise for only 15 seconds when you first begin. With practice, slowly increase the duration of the exercise by five seconds each time.

3. Relax at the end of the day with the 4-7-8 breathing exercise.

This exercise is intended to relax and calm your body and mind.

- Sit with your back straight.
- Move the tip of your tongue behind your upper front teeth.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, leaving your tongue behind your teeth.
- As you count to four, close your mouth and then inhale softly. Then hold your breath while you count to seven.
- Exhale through your mouth counting to eight.
- These steps comprise one breath of 4-7-8.
- Start over again by inhaling.
- Repeat the steps three more times.



The Joy of Caregiving

By Rick Lauber

Whether through casual chatter between friends or coverage on the evening news, caregiving often gets a bad rap. However, there are plenty of joys of caregiving as well.

When taking care of a parent, spouse or friend, many negative feelings – anger, grief, regret, frustration and sadness – can bubble to the surface. These emotions are talked about and associated with caregiving for

good reasons – they are difficult and undeniable. No matter what level of elder care you provide though, there are also numerous joys of caregiving.

Time Management Skills

There is nothing like looking after another individual's needs to help you with your own time management. You may learn to allow more time for certain appointments. This way, you and your parent have more time to reach these offices. Maybe you book appointments located within the same vicinity on the same afternoon to keep driving time to a minimum. You may also gain a better understanding of how much allotted time is necessary for

tasks. What can be done in 20 minutes and what needs a couple of hours to complete?

Organizational Abilities

Working hands-on with an aging senior can improve your own organizational abilities. When faced with juggling the many associated tasks of caregiving, along with the sometimes precarious balancing act required with you own life and family, providing elder care can help you become a far better multi-tasker. For example, I moved from using sticky notes for everything to developing a dedicated filing system for my parents' needs. Taking this one step further, I even bought a small filing cabinet and color-coded the files ... blue for healthcare, red for financial and so on.

Enhanced Family Dynamics

Should you be working with siblings while providing care, this can create an excellent opportunity to bond with a brother or sister. Improved communications between siblings is another related aspect. We must all learn to compromise for the sake of a parent. Remember, when the family is arguing about Mom or Dad's personal affairs, nothing gets done. Caregiving can become a family's greatest gift. By sharing the workload, you may form a deep relationship with a sibling.

Improved Relationships with Your Parent, Spouse or Friend

Decreasing physical and mental health in someone you are caring for doesn't have to be a drawback. My own father's Alzheimer's disease, for example, allowed me to become closer with him. Dad was always an intensely private man. However, his dementia knocked down those protective walls he had built up

around him and allowed me in. For the first time ever, I was able to hug dad and hear his approval. If your parent remains able to communicate, he/she may open up to you and tell you about issues once held private.

Greater Self-Awareness

What are your own strengths as a caregiver? When helping an aging senior, there is no shortage of accompanying responsibilities. You may provide day-to-day support as a Guardian or report on financial matters as a Trustee. You may shuttle your mom or dad to doctor's appointments, pick up medications, offer a manicure/pedicure or provide your parent a bath. When you can accomplish something (specifically something outside your own comfort zone), it can make you a stronger and more self-confident individual.

A Better Realization of What is Most Important

Providing care to a senior can be overwhelming at times. When you can delegate caring to another individual, you can take a break for yourself. Even if this is only 30 minutes, you may be able to stop and provide yourself some much-needed self-care. Have coffee with a good friend or soak in a soothing bubble bath. By recognizing how important self-care is, you may be better able to continue to practice this in the future.

Sense of Paying-Back

After so many years of Mom or Dad caring for you, you may feel pleased to now return the favor. Do not consider this as your "obligation." Instead, consider this as your "right" and "honor."

Meet the Authors



GINA ROBERTS-GREY

For over two decades, Gina Roberts-Grey has pored over studies and interviewed leading health experts on topics ranging from healthy aging, caregiving and longevity. Having been an active caregiver to her grandparents who lived into their 90's, Gina is passionate about supporting caregivers through their journeys.



RICK LAUBER

As a former co-caregiver, Rick Lauber helped and supported his own aging parents. His mother had Parkinson's and Leukemia and his father had Alzheimer's. Rick learned that caregiving is challenging and used writing to personally cope. His stories became two books, *Caregiver's Guide for Canadians* and *The Successful Caregiver's Guide*. To learn more about Rick and to connect with him, please visit www.ricklauber.com.



AUDREY MEINERTZHAGEN

As a Volunteer Caregiver to the Zen Hospice Project and a Course Manager at the CareGivers Project, Audrey Meinertzhagen is passionate about improving the standards of care for older adults and educating caregivers on the principles of mindfulness and self-care.



ASHLEY KROLLENBROCK

As a caregiver for her mom for 10 years, Ashley's goal is to empower families to keep their aging loved ones at home by sharing her story and practical knowledge. She has her Masters of Public Health and JD with a concentration in Health Policy & Law. Ashley has done legal work for two state protection and advocacy agencies for people with disabilities. She is passionate about disability justice, aging justice, health equity, and aging in place. Ashley lives in Oregon with her wife and mom, and when she's not writing or caregiving she loves to travel, garden, and hike with her dogs.

About Home Care Assistance

At Home Care Assistance, we provide customized care to older adults so they can live happier, healthier lives at home. We champion the needs of seniors with a positive, empowering approach to aging that celebrates independence, dignity and quality of life. Our caregivers receive exceptional training, support and resources to deliver an unmatched care experience.

High Quality Care

We go above and beyond to deliver concierge-level care for clients who want, and expect, the very best for their aging loved ones.

Committed to our Clients

We believe the best way to deliver exceptional care is to focus on building long-term, trusting relationships between caregivers, seniors and their families.

Elevated Quality of Life

Our Balanced Care Method emphasizes healthy mind, body and spirit. We believe that with the proper care, we can help older family members live happier, healthier and more fulfilled lives.

Trusted Care Expertise

We are experts in all aspects of home care, from family dynamics to nutrition, around-the-clock care to dementia. And we train our caregivers accordingly.

Total Peace of Mind

We understand the trust you place in us, and do everything possible to ensure that the home care experience is worry-free for all concerned.

Connected in the Community

We are the trusted partner of reputable care professionals in the communities we serve. We pride ourselves on connecting our clients to the care solutions they need - even if it's outside our service offerings.



650-416-1565

HomeCareAssistance.com



OUR MISSION

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