



*Area Agency on Aging, PSA 2*

# *Caregiving Series*

## **CARING FOR YOURSELF**

*Mother was never very involved with us.  
I once prayed she would pay more attention to the kids and me.  
Now I wish she would stop calling 5 and 6 times a day.*

Caregiving can be rewarding one day and frustrating the next. The physical, emotional, and financial demands of caregiving can become overwhelming, and if you don't take care of yourself, you won't be able to continue caring for your loved one. These tips can help you balance your responsibilities to yourself, the person you care for, and the other people in your life.

- **Call on Others:** Ask for help from family members and friends. Include family members who live out of town. Tell helpers specifically what you need and try to match tasks to their abilities. One person may feel comfortable giving personal care and another will prefer helping with paperwork. Use community services and paid caregivers to lighten your load. Contact the Area Agency on Aging for information about services and programs.
- **Establish Realistic Goals:** Assess your loved one's needs and your own needs, and then establish realistic goals and priorities. You can't do it all. Don't take over the things your loved ones can still do. By allowing them to stay as independent as possible, you are preserving their dignity.
- **Look at the Big Picture:** Step back from time to time and look at how things are working. Is what you are doing still effective? Have your loved one's needs changed? Do you need help with a particular task? Would a piece of special equipment make your job easier? Have your other responsibilities increased? Take action to resolve problems and decrease your stress.
- **Let Go of Things You Can't Change:** Your loved ones may refuse to follow suggestions you believe are in their best interest. If they seem to agree but don't follow through, or if they refuse to follow your suggestions after several tries, it is time to let go and realize they are going to do it their way. Unless they are mentally incapacitated and are putting themselves at life threatening risk, they have the right to make their own decisions. They may be impaired in some ways, but they are still adults.

- **Take Good Care of Yourself Physically and Mentally:** Take the time to enjoy nutritious meals. Exercise regularly; a short daily walk is relaxing and gives you a break from caregiving. Get enough sleep and rest. Arrange for extra help if your loved one keeps you up at night or if you often work late into the night to keep up. Be sure to keep your regular medical and dental appointments. Do not use excessive amounts of caffeine, alcohol, herbal products, or drugs of any kind. Get help if you cannot cut down on your own. Find a friend you can call anytime of the day or night to let off steam. Consult a mental health professional if you often feel depressed, anxious, or out of control. You cannot honor your commitments to yourself, your family members, or those you care for if you neglect your own health.
- **You Have a Life Beyond Caregiving:** You may need to make adjustments, but it is important to maintain your friendships, hobbies, interests, and social life even though you have less time. Eliminate any activities you no longer enjoy so you can focus on doing what you love. Spending time with friends and keeping up your interests will help you maintain the energy to continue caregiving.
- **Nurture Yourself:** Explore relaxation methods to relieve stress such as meditation, massage, or yoga. Learn to set limits and to say “no”. Write in a journal or write a letter expressing your frustrations and don’t mail it. Take a relaxing bath. Pace yourself; rushing leads to mishaps and wastes time. Give yourself a weekly treat. Do not compare yourself to others; every situation is unique. Remind yourself every day that you are doing as well as you can. Sing, dance, and most of all laugh.



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*For more information or a list of titles in this series,  
contact the **Area Agency on Aging, PSA 2.**  
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