

Self-Care for Caregivers During COVID-19

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Being a caregiver for a loved one who has cognitive challenges can be rewarding, but can also be physically and mentally taxing. This is even more true during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Though caring for your loved one is often the number one priority it is just as important to ensure and attend to your own physical and mental well-being. Therefore,



we encourage caregivers to make meaningful time for themselves and engage in self-care. By doing so, this reduces the likelihood of developing *caregiver stress*. Caregiver stress, also referred to as *caregiver burden*, is the negative impact of caregiving on the caregiver's emotional, physical, social, and financial functioning, which can increase the risk for depression, anxiety, cognitive impairment, and other health concerns. Caregiver stress is one of the greatest predictors of negative outcomes for the caregivers themselves and can negatively impact the quality of care the individual provides.



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Warning Signs. Some caregivers are unaware of their level of caregiver stress. Below are some common warning signs:

Physical Signs

- Lack of energy, overwhelming fatigue
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Changes in eating habits, weight gain/loss
- New or worsening health problems
- Pain
- Headaches
- Neglecting other responsibilities
- Increased substance use (e.g., alcohol, tobacco, marijuana)

Emotional Signs

- Depression, anxiety, or crying more than usual
- Feeling helpless or hopeless
- Social withdrawal, self-isolation, or feeling alone and unsupported
- Increased feelings of resentment
- Difficulty concentrating
- Impatience or irritability
- Feeling overwhelmed

How to Manage Caregiver Burden

It can be difficult to make time for yourself, especially while sheltering in place due to COVID-19. However, it is still important to find a consistent time every week to focus on yourself and your own needs. Below are some tips to help manage caregiver stress:

Exercise: Exercise can impact mood and cognition. As medically permitted, set time aside to engage in an exercise routine. Go for a walk or run or do some yoga. Many videos are available online for free: The Body Coach TV, Fitness Blender, Yoga with Adriene, or search YouTube for your favorite type of exercise. There are thousands of free videos available!

Healthy Diet: Diet can also impact mood and cognitive functioning. Every once in a while it is nice to treat yourself to a good delicious meal. However, it is important to avoid stress eating. Allow yourself to order or cook your favorite meal (including dessert!), but also include healthy food options. Remember, what is good for your heart is good for your brain.



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Stay Socially Active: Remaining socially active is important to overall health and mood. Do not isolate from others. Take some time to call a friend or family. Zoom, Skype, and Facetime provides free methods to video-conference with loved ones during the pandemic. Even though meeting in person may not always be possible, video conferencing is an alternate way to stay connected and spend time with others.

Sleep: Good sleep is imperative to overall well being. When caring for loved ones, our own sleep may be impacted by their sleep patterns and needs. Keeping a regular schedule as much as possible will help define sleep-wake times, as will making sure the environment is comfortable and conducive to sleep. Check out some sleep tips [here](#).

Engage in Hobbies: Whatever your hobbies may be, it is important not to lose yourself in your caregiving duties. Pick up old hobbies, try new ones. Hobbies provide methods to engage and relax your mind in healthy habits. Examples include reading, writing, singing, gardening, cooking, and many more.

Seek support: Coping and adjusting to the medical limitations and challenges of a loved one can be emotionally taxing. Talking to family members or friends may help. If you feel you need more support, we encourage you to seek professional help. Most therapists have found ways to provide psychotherapy via telehealth. At SFN, we offer [supportive therapy](#) for caregivers. Please do not hesitate to reach out for a [free 15-minute consultation](#) for more information.

Respite care: It may not always be feasible to leave your loved one alone for an extended amount of time. Reach out to other family members to see if they could assist with caregiving needs while you engage in self-care. Respite care services may also provide short-term time-limited options for you to take a break, while knowing that your loved one is safe. The [ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center](#) provides a search tool to find respite programs in CA.

Resources for Caregivers

Support Groups, Clubs, and Events

- [Alzheimer's Association: Caregiver Support Groups](#)
- [Training and Education by Alzheimer's Association](#)
- [Lewy Body Dementia Association: Virtual Support Groups](#)
- [Lewy Body Dementia Association: Local Support Groups](#)
- [HFC: Online Support Groups for Caregivers](#)
- [HFC: Summer Series Book Club](#)
- [Help and Hope in Alzheimer's Care and Research Webinar](#) (July 10, 2020)



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Caregiving During COVID-19

- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Tips for Dementia Caregivers](#)
- [COVID-19 Articles and Resources](#)
- Caregiving and the Coronavirus: Tip Sheet for Caregivers in [English](#), [Spanish](#), and [Chinese](#)

Additional Resources

- [Be a Healthy Caregiver](#)
- [The Caregiver's Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide with Tools, Resources and In-Depth Solutions to Some of Caregiving's Toughest Challenges](#)
- [HFC Caregiving Resources](#)
- [Internet Services for Low-Income Adults](#)
- [Low-Cost Equipment for Seniors](#)
- [Women's Alzheimer's Movement: Caregiving Resources](#)