

# CARING FOR YOURSELF

*As a caregiver it is easy to neglect your own needs because you are so focused on caring for your loved one. This is understandable, but to offer your loved one the best possible care, you need to be healthy, both physically and emotionally. In the next few pages, learn strategies for taking better care of yourself while caring for a cancer patient.*

## Ways to Care Yourself

Caring for someone who is sick while also worrying about what the future holds can be exhausting and might lead to burnout. Caregiving can often be a full-time job. Frequently, caregivers will just keep doing what needs to be done and neglect their own well-being or feel guilty if they take time for themselves. However, part of being a good caregiver is to also make sure you are caring for yourself.

Try the following strategies to help you take care of yourself. Even if you only have a few minutes to spare here and there to do these things, it can still make a difference.

- ▶ Get some form of exercise like walking or other physical activities you enjoy.
  - ▶ Create a support system. Call friends or family when you need to talk or need help.
  - ▶ Keep up with a hobby or something you enjoy doing, such as reading, painting or gardening.
  - ▶ Try to stay connected with friends even if you do have to cut back on your social life.
- ▶ Eat well-balanced meals. Caregiving can leave little time, and many people turn to fast food or junk food. Get the good nutrition your body needs!
  - ▶ Have a place where you can go to “escape” and be by yourself.
  - ▶ Set priorities each day and make sure the most important tasks get done, but try not to worry about items further down on your to-do list.
  - ▶ Seek proper medical care for yourself including check-ups with your primary care provider.
  - ▶ Maintain healthy lifestyle habits.
  - ▶ Try to get a good amount of sleep each night, and find time to rest throughout the day, if possible.

Accept help from friends and family. Learning to let go and to accept help will lower your anxiety levels and boost your spirits. People want to help, but they may not know your needs. Keep a list of all caregiving tasks. That way, when friends or family offer to help, you can give them specific tasks. Try using a caregiver mobile app or website to help you coordinate help from family and friends.

## TIP

In order to care for your loved one, you have to take care of yourself too. As the saying goes, you can't pour from an empty cup.



Examples of caregiving coordination apps include:

- Lotsa Helping Hands  
[www.lotsahelpinghands.com](http://www.lotsahelpinghands.com)
- Caringbridge  
[www.caringbridge.org](http://www.caringbridge.org)
- MyLifeLine  
[www.mylifeline.org](http://www.mylifeline.org)

## Take a break

If you're a full-time caregiver, you can't always take a day off, but learning techniques to alleviate stress throughout the day can be extremely helpful. Try deep breathing techniques or meditation. Listen to relaxing music, take a short walk or call a friend. Try to allocate at least 30 minutes a day to do something for yourself.



Being a caregiver is stressful. It is a necessary thing... To me, there is a lot of on-the-job training. There are a lot of decisions that you have to make that you wish you didn't have to make; a lot of decisions that you have to make that you are just completely unprepared for, but in order to get through it, you definitely need some down time. You need some 'me' time and don't feel bad about it."

— Kimberly, caregiver and wife of Elijah, who passed from myeloma

Excerpt from from July 2018 "No Playbook for Caregiving: Kimberly's Story" podcast episode on The Bloodline with LLS

## Creating a Self-Care Plan

*Use the following prompts to create a self-care plan. It's easy to say you want to take more time for yourself, but it can be hard to actually find the time if you don't consciously build it into your schedule or set self-care goals.*

### Emotional Self-Care Plan

Taking care of your emotional health is just as important as caring for your physical health. It's important to take time for yourself each day and to keep up with activities that you enjoy. With the daily responsibilities of caregiving, you may forget to do these things.

What activities do you enjoy?  
Check all that apply.

- Listening to music, playing an instrument, or singing
  - Reading or listening to audiobooks
  - Exercising or participating in group exercise classes
  - Playing sports or organized games with friends
  - Hiking, fishing, or other outdoor sports
  - Meditating or practicing yoga
  - Painting, drawing, or other types of art
  - Journaling or creative writing
  - Attending religious or spiritual services
  - Activities with friends or family
- Practicing personal care, such as long baths, manicures or face masks
  - Cooking or baking
  - Watching movies or TV shows
  - Playing video or computer games
  - Puzzles
  - Yard work or gardening
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Any of the activities above can be part of a self-care plan. Pick one or two of your favorite activities and make them a priority in your daily life. Then fill out the following statements to create goals for emotional self-care.

I will set aside time to

\_\_\_\_\_ once a day.

*Examples: Drink coffee on the front porch, read a devotional, meditate and stretch, write in a journal, etc.*

I will set aside time to

\_\_\_\_\_ once a week.

*Examples: Get dinner with friends, attend a religious or spiritual service, go to an art or*

### Physical Self-Care Plan

As a caregiver, if you are not physically well, you will not be able to take care of your loved one.

Check all the statements below that are true:

- I eat a well-balanced diet that includes a variety of fruits and vegetables, proteins, whole grains, and healthy fats
- I drink at least eight 8-oz glasses of water or fluid a day
- I sleep well each night and wake up feeling rested
- I exercise for 30 minutes at least three times a week
- I do not smoke or use tobacco
- I only drink alcohol in moderation
- I keep up with my own medical needs, such as getting an annual checkup from my primary care provider and I get regular dental cleanings

Did you leave statements unchecked? If so, you may need to consider improving those aspects of physical self-care. Talk to your primary care provider about ways to improve your health and well-being.

What are some ways in which you can improve your physical well-being?

*Example: Drink more water to stay hydrated*

Write down a few short-term goals to improve your physical well-being.

*Example: I will keep a water bottle with me and use it throughout the day*

## Stay Calm Strategy

When caring for a loved one with cancer, there will be times that are very difficult and emotional. It's unavoidable. Prepare for these moments by having a strategy in place to help yourself stay calm if you feel anxious or overwhelmed. Having a plan in place, in advance, will help you better manage unexpected intense emotions.

Try the following strategies:

- ▶ Do a breathing exercise (for example – breathe in for 5 seconds, hold your breath for 5 seconds and then breathe out for 5 seconds)
- ▶ Repeat a meaningful mantra, affirmation or prayer
- ▶ Close your eyes and sit in silence
- ▶ Stand up and stretch
- ▶ Take a quick walk outside
- ▶ Call a close friend or family member  
When I feel overwhelmed I will

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## Ask for Help and Delegate Tasks

As a primary caregiver for a loved one with cancer, you may worry that if you don't take care of your loved one, then no one else will. More than likely, there are friends and family members who really want to help—they just might not know how - so you can let them know!

What tasks could you delegate to someone else? Use the chart below to think of some tasks and some friends and family members who can help you with your caregiver responsibilities.



Use **Creating a Self-Care Plan** if you think it would be helpful and motivate you to take better care of yourself.

## DEEP BELLY BREATHING EXERCISE

1. Sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes.
2. Place one hand on your stomach and your other hand on your chest.
3. Take a deep breath through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The hand on your chest shouldn't move much.
4. Exhale through your nose. The hand on your stomach should move, and the hand on your chest shouldn't move much. Focus on your breathing and your hands.

There are a variety of breathing exercises you can find online. Try a few different ones to find one that works for you.



City of Hope offers videos with breathing and meditation exercises on their YouTube channel. You can visit their channel at [www.youtube.com/user/cityofhopeonline](http://www.youtube.com/user/cityofhopeonline) and go to the playlists tab to access a variety of helpful exercises.

TASK	HELPER	NOTES
Ex: Take John to appointment on Monday	Aunt Susan	Susan doesn't work on Mondays and she lives close by



