

Self-care for the Caregiver

Source: [Canadian Women's Health Network](#)

Who are the caregivers?

A caregiver is anyone who provides care and support to someone who is unable to take care of themselves. This can be someone who is elderly, a child, or a person with a chronic illness or who has a disability. Often, caregivers are women family members who add unpaid caregiving to their many responsibilities. In Canada, women do up to 80 percent of the unpaid caregiving. Many caregivers may be elderly and needing care themselves.

How can I take care of myself while I am caregiving for someone else?

The demands of unpaid caregiving can be very stressful. While it may seem like the last thing you have time to do, it's very important to maintain your own health while you are caring for someone else. Here are some ways you can reduce the amount of stress you feel and stay healthy yourself:

- Remember that you need a life outside of your caregiving responsibilities. Make time regularly for activities you enjoy.
- Seek out support. Ask for help from other family members and friends. Check the phone book for respite providers, support groups and other services for caregivers.
- Get rest. Take breaks when you can. Explore activities that help you relax.
- Eat well-balanced meals. Choose a variety of foods from Canada's Guide to Healthy Eating. Good nutrition provides your body with fuel so you can be active and alert. Avoid reaching for convenience or "fast-foods" when in a hurry. These foods can be high in calories but low in nutrition.
- Explore healthy coping strategies and stress reduction techniques like yoga, tai chi, relaxation and deep breathing exercises. Your local library and community centres can be excellent sources of information.
- Learn about the condition or situation of the person you are providing care for. Knowing what to expect can reduce stress and help you solve problems when they arise.
- Be realistic about what you can do. Recognize that taking care of someone takes time and energy and that there are limits to what one person can do.
- Decide which tasks are most important to you and which ones you are comfortably able to provide. Don't feel guilty for not being able to do something or for saying "no".
- If you smoke, try to reduce the amount you smoke or try to quit. Some smokers feel like smoking is the only break they can get in a day. If you need a break, try taking a quick walk or doing some simple stretches between activities.
- Share your feelings. It's common for caregivers to have mixed feelings. While you may find caregiving rewarding, you may also feel anger, sadness, frustration and grief. You might find

your feelings confusing or not be sure how to handle them. Try not to judge the way you feel. Feelings are not good or bad, just a normal part of being human.

- Focus on the positive. Try not to dwell on difficulties. Cherish the small successes of each day - a brief outing, or a pleasant meal. Remembering times when things went well can help you get through difficult times.

Caregiving is hard work, filled with many demands. It can also be very rewarding to know that you are caring for someone who cannot care for themselves. Finally, remember that you need to take care of yourself in order to be able to provide care to others, and that you don't need to do it all alone!