

# Fill Your Cup First: Self-care for everyday caregivers

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# Self Care is Very Important in Allowing You to Care for a Loved One

- Airplane **Instructions-secure your own oxygen mask first** and **then** that of your child passenger
- **This may seem selfish but it is not**-you cannot care for others and ignore your own feelings, needs, and well-being- they go hand in hand.
- **What would be selfish is not caring for you. You literally “give” care to you and to your loved one**
- Feeling guilty about taking time for yourself is not helpful- it undermines self-care (guilt leads to self-neglect)
- If caregiving were a breeze, self care would not be necessary
- Caring for you reflects the value and respect you have for yourself

# Self Care

- Your **ideas and expectations** about what caregiving is and what it will be in the future influence self-care.
- Caregiving reflects **two sides of the same coin**.
- Acknowledge that caregiving can be **stressful and challenging** (cancer, dementia, stroke, GC care).
- It can involve **strong feelings**- sadness/grief, anger, resentment, anxiety/depression.
- Yet, caregiving can be an **opportunity to grow** - deepen relationships, reinforce love and commitment, lead to new opportunities, skills, insights, and attitudes

# Self Care

- **YOU** define what caregiving is for you. What others think or expect per se is irrelevant.
- This is important in that enables you to **prioritize** you.
- Yet, be open to **feedback** about you-your feelings, skills.
- Self care is **proactive**- YOU develop a self care plan that works for you. This plan will lead to satisfaction that you have done a good job in caregiving.
- A **self care plan** structures caregiving and enhances self confidence.
- A self care plan allows you to **assess** your strengths and weaknesses and **prepares** you for the challenges of caregiving.

# Developing a Self-Care Plan

- Be prepared- do not go into caregiving blindly
  - 1) **educate** yourself-what will you be facing? How will your life change? Will this change your relationships?
  - 2) **evaluate** the quality of your relationship to the person you will be caring for-how will it change?
  - 3) what **skills and resources** will you need?
  - 4) what **services** and people will you be able to rely upon? **Intimate or instrumental** support?
  - 5) What **feelings** do you have about providing care? Fear, anxiety, anger, sadness/grief, resentment, self-confidence, calmness, joy? anticipation?

# Self Care

- 6) Who can you talk to about these feelings?
  - **Friend, family member, service provider, professional counselor, chaplain- join a support group**
  - **Advantages of a support group** (*“connected is protected”*)
    - Share feelings/experiences with those who are caregivers too – you receive feedback about your feelings, behaviors
    - Sources of info about the illness, services for you and your loved one
    - Loss of stigma of feeling different or alone
    - Ready source of emotional support-others feel the same way
    - You learn your feelings are neither good or bad. They are not a barometer of how adequate you are as a caregiver- “I should” (“should not”) feel this way/that way-”shoulds” are not helpful

# Self care

- **Do not put off sharing**, especially if your feelings are getting in the way of your well-being, ability to provide care, relationships with the person your are caring for or with family, your career, friendships
- Focus on those **feelings** (e.g., anger, guilt) that are **undermining self care** as well as your relationship to a loved one, other family, friends-potential for abuse
- Do not forget to focus on **positive feelings**- they are a source of strength and self confidence
- Being **self-critical** may sound noble, but it **undermines** your self esteem and self confidence

# Self Care Plan

- **Relationship** to the person you are caring for?
  - Emotionally close?
  - Tension-filled? Difficult to care for? Pushes back?
  - Potential for mutual affection and love?
  - Open communication and sharing?
  - Ability to compromise?
  - Can each of you look at things from the other's point of view?
  - Can each of you thank one another for just being yourselves?
  - Willing to leave the past in the past?
- Take the time to **nurture** this relationship-**quality time**

# Self Care

- Ask yourself the following questions:
  - **What is the nature of care you must provide?**
    - Incontinence? Side effects of meds?
  - **Will you need new skills** (e.g. personal hygiene, giving injections, administering medications? lifting someone from a bed to a wheelchair?)
  - **Will you need new knowledge?** About dementia? Cancer? PD? FTD? Diabetes?

# Self care

- **What demands will be made on me?**
  - Give up my job? Get a new one? Move? Ask for Leave?
  - Move in with my loved one/they move in with me?
  - What would I have to do to the house to make this possible? Could I pay for it? Does my family agree?
  - Will I be caring for my children and my parent/spouse? “sandwiched caregiver”
  - Will my loved one qualify for needed services?
  - Who will help me pay for care? Medicare? Medicaid? (spend down my/his or her assets to qualify?) Insurance?

# Self Care

- What will be the **duration** of the care you will provide? Short term? Long term?
- **In whose home will it be provided?** Will you need a hospital bed? Eggcrate mattress? Special needs shower or bath care? Is this realistic?
- Is the course of the illness **predictable or not?**
- **Specialized services needed?** Hospice? Rehab? Long-term care? (local services guide?)
- **Legal/financial concerns?** Who will pay? End-of-life decisions (e.g. power of attorney? Advanced directive?)

# Self Care

- **Your feelings about providing care influence self care.** Do you feel forced into this? Do others in your family willingly volunteer to help? Do you feel “dumped on” or abandoned? Have you discussed this with them?
- Are there **others you can rely upon** for help and advice? Who are they? Moments notice?
- **Your health-**adequate diet, exercise, sleep?
- **Is caregiving a job?** A chore? A burden? Something you feel obligated to do? **OR**
- Is caregiving an **expression of your love and concern?**

# Self Care

- **Inevitably caregiving is sometimes stressful.** How do you cope with stress? What is your style of coping? Are you an emotional copier? Are you a problem solver? Are you logical, analytical, and mentally prepared?
- You must **cope with life changes and the demands of caregiving** (pre- vs. post caregiving life)
- **Accurately** appraising the stresses you will/are experiencing is important.
  - Do I have adequate resources to deal with stress?
  - Physical, health-related, emotional, interpersonal, financial, spiritual resources
  - Input from support group members, professional organizations (e.g. AARP, Alzheimer's Association, Parkinson's, FTD websites) –on-line support and chat groups, churches, home health care aides/nurses

# Self Care Plan

- **Be realistic-** you are not perfect. You will make mistakes. You will learn from these mistakes as your situation changes. Guilt or blame accomplishes nothing.
- **Create a daily routine.** “Me time”- a walk, lunch, TV – a respite from stress. **Do not compromise on this.**
- How can you make caregiving **a plus** rather than a minus? What is satisfying and pleasurable? Your successes?
- Create a team- your **convoy of support** (inner/outer layers).
- What are your emotional and physical **limits**? What will you do if you exceed these limits? How can you avoid this?

# Self Care Plan

- Set some caregiving **goals**-personally, vocationally, physically, spiritually. “e.g. I want to accomplish..”
- Derive a **plan** to meet your goals and overcome barriers (\$, transportation, health) to doing so. e.g. “step A, step B, barrier A, barrier B”-address each barrier separately
- **Tend to your own physical and emotional health**
  - Resist the temptation to label some feelings as bad and others as good- avoid the “shoulds and should nots”
  - Have someone you can talk with when you are feeling sad, depressed, frustrated, hopeless
  - Seek out information and input from others-validate your own ideas and expectations
  - Being willing to ask for help-”going it alone” is not necessary or a badge of honor – **avoid allowing yourself to become isolated**

# Self Care Plan

- Keep on top of things
  - Do I need new skills? More help? More information?
  - How can improve my time management?
  - Am I tending to my own health? How tired am I?
  - Have I exceeded my limits? Sometimes not possible.
    - Persons to talk to, Me-time, professional input
  - What are my strengths? Am I taking advantage of them? Patience, sense of humor, resilience?
  - How is my mood?
  - Am I patient? Hopeful? Oriented toward solutions or problems?

# Self care plan-Staying atop things

- How do I feel when I wake up in the morning? What do I say to myself? Do I look forward to the day?
- Am I open to feedback from others?
  - My health/appearance
  - My behavior
  - My feelings
  - My knowledge
  - My attitudes toward getting help
- I am optimistic about the future?
- Look for the positive-”glass half full” mentality

# Self Care Plan

- **Self care skills:**

- Adequate sleep, physical exercise, diet
- Spending **quality time** with loved ones
- Taking medications as prescribed
- Prayer meditation, tai chi, yoga, cat naps
- Getting respite care (formal-paid and informal)
- Avoid drugs or alcohol to cope
- Setting aside “me time”- shopping, lunch, a drive, a walk, watching a favorite TV show
- Touching base **daily** with friends and family
- Rewarding yourself when things go right
- Thinking positively about you-keeping the “old you” (Am I her husband or her caregiver?)

# Self Care Plan

## **Self Care Skills:**

- Use facetime, zoom, facebook or other social media to connect
- Purposefully schedule relaxation or exercise
- Monitor your mood, level of fatigue, and frustration daily
- Before going to bed, evaluate your day- how did it go?
  - What did you do well?
  - Are there areas in which you could improve? New skills you needed? How can you acquire them? Experts available?
  - How did you feel when things went well? Not well?
  - What did you do to enhance or deepen your relationship with the loved one you are caring for?
  - Were you open to feedback and suggestions?
  - Did you need help? Did you ask for help when you needed it?

# Caregiving and Self Care

- **Take Home Messages**

- Caregiving is an act of love
- Caregiving is a journey – be patient
- Caregiving has its ups and downs
- Feeling frustrated is normal- giving up or lashing out is not
- Avoid self-neglect and isolation/loneliness
- Look for the rewards in caregiving
- Remaining hopeful, yet realistic about the future-keep a balance
- Keeping a sense of humor in the face of stress “laughter and love will pull us through”
- Caregiving is easier if you share your feelings with others
- Put your own oxygen mask on first!