

# Simple Self-care Tips for Caregivers

By Amanda Farquharson, BSN, RN

A caregiver is someone who cares for a friend or family member without compensation. According to [statistics](#) Canada 7.8 million Canadians are unpaid caregivers; some people spend 20 or more hours a week caregiving. Balancing caregiving on top of other responsibilities such as raising children, working, and relationships can become a challenge.

It is important as a caregiver to look after yourself with a healthy lifestyle, and to participate in self-care and social activities. Making yourself a priority will help to avoid caregiver burnout (*please hyperlink to caregiver burnout article*), reduce stress, and decrease frustration that may arise with your role as a caregiver. You will be the most help to the person you are looking after if you are in a good personal place, physically and mentally.

If you are a caregiver and you find yourself being worn down, exhausted and not feeling like yourself it's a good time to take some moments to assess your own needs and participate in self care activities.

## What is Self-Care?

Self-care is the intentional art of looking after your own spiritual, physical, mental, emotional, environmental, recreational, and social health.

## Why is Self-Care Important for Caregivers?

Being a caregiver adds extra tasks to complete in a day so it is important to make time for your own health.

A study done by the [Multinational Association of Supportive Care in Cancer](#) found that caregivers who spent less time looking after their own health, mentally, spiritually and physically, were less prepared to handle the stress, problem solving and decision-making responsibilities that come with caring for someone else. The more hours that someone spends caregiving the more likely they are to report feeling stressed, overwhelmed, and frustrated. This in turn affects the ability to care for yourself as well as others.

## How to Implement Self-care

A few simple ways to ensure you are taking care of yourself while caring for a loved one are to assess your own emotions.

Take some quiet time, reflect and ask yourself these questions:

- How am I feeling right now? (physically & mentally & spiritually)
- Am I well rested? Do I sleep well?
- Am I quick to anger or feel frustrated?
- Have I done something for myself today?
- Am I feeling hydrated and well nourished?

## Daily Ways to Practice Self Care

- Take time for yourself:
  - Go for a walk
  - Get outside
  - Do some simple [stretching](#) and [breathing](#) exercises
  - [Journaling](#) is a great way to express emotions, thoughts and feelings
  - Listen to music
  - Pick up an old hobby or get a new one; knitting, crocheting, sudoku, crossword, reading, etc.
  - Participate in leisure activities that you enjoy; go to the gym, or the pool
- Eat a balanced diet
- Stay hydrated
- Try [Hand Reflexology](#) - self treatment
- Reach out to friends and family; allow others to help
- Go for a coffee or out to lunch, solo or with a friend

### Other ways to make sure you are looking after yourself:

- Keep up with your own medical appointments
- Join a support group
  - [Greater Trail hospice](#) has a volunteer support network offering 1-on-1 or group support. This type of formal support can help caregivers assess and work through the many emotions that come with caring for a loved one.
  - [West Kootenay Boundary Caregiver support](#)
- [Set boundaries](#) - as a caregiver it is often the intention to help as much as possible, but it is very important to conserve your energy and time and be able to say no - and mean it.

### Resources:

- [Caring for yourself](#): Tips and resources to help care for yourself, aimed at caregivers.
- [Looking after you: Lessons from the airline industry](#): Canadian Virtual Hospice website, module 4 of the *Caregiver Series*, these lessons provide personal and professional experience on how to care for yourself while caring for others.
- [The Emotional Side of Caregiving](#): Family Care Alliance website, this article gives an in depth description of the many emotions that caregivers may face and strategies on how to cope with them.

### Sources:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/reports-publications/responding-stressful-events/self-care-caregivers.html>

<https://www.caregiver.org/resource/taking-care-you-self-care-family-caregivers/>

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220114/dq220114c-eng.htm>

<https://www.caregiver.org/resource/emotional-side-caregiving/>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5481472/>

<https://caregiver.com/articles/benefits-journaling/>

<https://www.caregiver.org/resource/caregiver-relaxation-exercises-series-english/>

<https://myallamericancare.com/blog/2019/08/30/simple-stretches-you-can-do-to-stay-healthy-as-a-caregiver-on-the-job/>

