

Caring for Yourself

Taking care of yourself is one of the most important things you can do for the person you are caring for. As the saying goes, “You cannot pour from an empty cup.” All too often, caregivers find themselves in poor health, overwhelmed, and physically and emotionally exhausted. There’s no better time than the present to start taking care of yourself.

Here are some ways you can take care of yourself:

- **Join an Alzheimer’s San Diego Support and Discussion Group.** These groups offer a wealth of information, support, solutions and new knowledge to help you on your caregiving journey.
- **Take a five minute break each day.** Rejuvenating your mind and releasing emotions is important for living in the present. Be kind to yourself.
- **Spend time with friends.** Connecting with others, stimulating your brain and having an outlet to revive yourself are all ways to reduce stress and maintain a healthy lifestyle.
- **Schedule time for your hobbies and interests.** Doing the things you love will increase your energy levels and help to extend positivity and patience.
- **Eat healthy foods.** It’s easy to eat comfort foods, but they add to fatigue, poor health and other medical problems. Staying energized and alert will help with cognitive functioning and a healthier heart. You only have one body. Make sure to take care of it.
- **Get exercise as often as you can.** If you aren’t able to get out of the house each day, look for ways to stay active in the home through cleaning, gardening, or vacuuming.
- **See your doctor on a regular basis.** Regular check-ups are a good way to monitor your overall health and alert you if early health intervention is needed.
- **Keep your health, legal, and financial information up-to-date.** Having a plan in place, in the event that anything happens to you, will ensure safety of the person you are caring for and can relieve unnecessary stress on the family.

It’s Okay to Ask for Help

Asking for help can be hard, especially if you have always done everything on your own, are not sure what others can help with, or feel as if you are imposing. We encourage you to try again as your health depends on it. Others will communicate whether or not they can help. If you have trouble asking for help, try these tips:

- Ask people to help out in specific ways like making a meal, picking up a prescription, visiting the person with dementia, or taking the person out for a short time.
- Call for help from in-home care, respite options or adult day care services when you need it. To find resources in your area, contact Alzheimer’s San Diego at 858-492-4400.

If you are a veteran or caring for one, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) might be of help to you. To learn more, visit the VA Caregiver Support website at www.caregiver.va.gov or the San Diego County Office of Military & Veteran's Affairs at 858-694-3222.

Your Emotional Health

You may be busy caring for the person with dementia and don't take time to think about your emotional health. Caring for a person with dementia takes a lot of time and effort. Sometimes, you may feel discouraged, guilty, sad, lonely, frustrated, confused, or angry. *These feelings are normal.*

Here are some things you can say to yourself that might help you feel better:

- I'm doing the best I can.
- It's the disease talking.
- What I'm doing would be hard for anyone.
- I'm not perfect, but that's okay.
- I can't control some things that happen. I can only control my reaction.
- Sometimes, I just need to do what works for right now.
- Even when I do everything I can think of, the person with dementia will still have difficult symptoms because of the illness, not because of what I do.
- I will enjoy the moments when we can be together in peace.

Meeting Your Spiritual Needs

As a caregiver of a person with dementia, you may need more spiritual resources than others do. Meeting your spiritual needs can help you cope better as a caregiver and find a sense of balance and peace. Some people like to be involved with others as part of a faith community, such as a church, temple, or mosque. For others, simply having a sense that larger forces are at work in the world helps meet their spiritual needs.

Helpful videos on this topic:

Teepa Snow, Self-Care	www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUgPm8RMa48
Teepa Snow, Caregiver Guilt	www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmpQLf9IUNI
Teepa Snow, Bringing in a Third Party	www.youtube.com/watch?v=kX8cYNMfhkY
Teepa Snow, Helping Distant Family Members Understand Dementia has Become a Problem	www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_ZW_G3mPsl

Adapted from the National Institutes of Health Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral Center, 9/19/16.