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Although family caregiving can be an emotionally rewarding task, when we become the primary caregivers for a spouse, family member, friend, neighbor or loved one, it must be with the understanding and expectation that doing so will impact many areas of our own health, life and well-being..

Statistics from the National Family Caregivers Association indicate 82% of caregivers find the demands overwhelming and 76% report getting ill more frequently themselves.

So it is important to take advantage of available resources to complement your caregiving efforts and provide for your own health and well-being, as well as that of your loved one.

How to Care for Yourself While Caregiving Others

For Stress About Your Loved One

Get a diagnosis early . What you don't know, can indeed hurt you... and your loved one. Alzheimer's, other dementias and other long-term degenerative illnesses are difficult to diagnose and require many intricate medical tests. See a specialist, a neurologist, get a CAT scan, check with a local memory disorder clinic and see a clinical psychologist.

Be informed. There are over 200 types of dementia. Some are reversible, depending upon the cause. Others can be greatly improved with the right treatment and medication combinations. New discoveries are made every day. Study, use the internet, talk to experts and ask questions.

Prepare to the fullest of your capabilities. Prepare your living environment with every strategy you can to make behavior, safety and daily living easy. Learn all the tricks the professionals use about lifting, transferring, feeding, bathing, dressing, toileting and other tasks of caregiving. Take caregiving classes and find the easiest way to do things.

Know the community resources. Several phone numbers now belong on your speed dial. Know what help and financial support your loved one is entitled to and enroll them in all available programs that would benefit their condition.

Ways to be a Healthy Caregiver

Take a break.. If it is too exasperating, walk away for a moment. Go outside, breath deep. Give it a minute. Try another activity. Come back to it later.

Get help. No one can do it all alone, all the time. Develop a circle of helpers who can spell you, even with one tiny activity.

Support. You need to talk, to express your frustration and ventilate your emotions. Even a short phone conversation can help.

Meditate. The breath is key to relaxing. Take 2 minutes to sit comfortably, relax your jaw and slow your breathing while focusing on something pleasant.

Unplug. Turn off everything electronic, cell phones, computers, televisions and do fewer things at once.

Strive for Balance. All work and no play, will make you sick. Leave what you can until tomorrow.

Indulge. You have to restore yourself. Get a neck massage or a manicure, cut some fresh flowers to bring indoors or take a moment to feel some sunshine on your face.

Hire it out if you can. Your health and well-being are more important than money. If you can afford to at all, hire chores done.