

Stress Reduction Strategies for Caregivers

If your goal is to provide optimal care for your loved one, you must take care of yourself first. For many women especially, self-care is challenging. Caring for others just seems to come more naturally. But, imagine you're on an airplane. What does the flight attendant tell you to do in an emergency? *Secure your own oxygen mask first—then tend to your loved one.* The same principle holds true for caregiving.

Consider the following strategies for self-care and stress reduction:

- Gain support through a community support group or online via a caregiver support group or forum. If you are really struggling with stress, one-on-one counseling with a mental health professional may be more appropriate.
- Exercise daily and strive to maintain a healthy diet.
- Reserve quiet time for meditation and relaxation.
- Obtain regular respite to recharge physically and emotionally. If needed, contact the National Respite Coalition to secure quality respite services. Call 1-800-677-1116 or visit www.archrespice.org.
- Whenever possible, rotate responsibilities with another family member or friend.
- Stay active and involved with hobbies. Do something daily just for the fun of it!
- Maintain friendships and other social connections. Studies have shown that socially isolated individuals are at greater risk for health problems. So, talk with others about your experiences. It can lower your blood pressure and increase your immune system's ability to fight disease.
- Keep up with your own healthcare and preventive screenings.

Besides improving your quality of life, adopting these strategies will allow you to continue to provide optimal care for your loved one. Remember, just as an oxygen mask only works if you put it on, you must actively seek the support you need and make self-care a priority.

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