

MANAGING CAREGIVER STRESS

Some caregivers believe that any focus on themselves is selfish. However, to quote Dennis Portnoy in *Overextended and Undernourished: A Self-Care Guide for People in Helping Roles*, attending to your own needs is “enlightened self-interest”. Do take time for yourself so you can find the renewed energy to continue your task with the care, dedication and inner strength that you bring to this role.

These tips will help you design your self-care plan:

- **Have realistic expectations.** Learn all you can about your loved one’s condition and be realistic about what you can and cannot do.
- **Ask for and accept help.** Share the care. Most people are willing to help when you take the step to let them know what you need.
- **Bring humor** into your life. Laughter helps put things in a more positive perspective. Seeing the lighter side of things may help you cope.
- **Connect with others** to help ensure that you do not become isolated physically or emotionally. This could mean finding someone you trust who you can talk to, joining a suitable support group, or regular involvement in a hobby or recreational activity that you are interested in.
- **Learn to control what causes you stress.** Establish limits. Identify what you can and cannot change. Practice slow, deep, mindful breathing. By regulating your breath, it is possible to slow down all physiological activity, including heartbeat. Blood pressure lowers, pulse rate slows, and tense muscles find release.
- **Recognize your physical signs of stress.** Eat well, get adequate amounts of rest and visit your doctor.
- **Accept and share your feelings.** It is normal for caregivers to experience a wide range of emotions. Find someone you are comfortable with talking to about how you feel and what is troubling you.
- **Take time for yourself** so you can find the renewed energy to return to your tasks with the care, dedication, and inner strength that bring you to this role of caregiving in the first place. Identify and engage in activities and interests that have a calming effect on you such as walking, music and reading. Research respite options in your community.