

Four Tips for Self-Care for Caregivers – Ask an Expert

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Caregivers provide assistance and support to individuals with chronic illnesses or disabilities. About one in three American adults report being a caregiver in the past, and one in five report currently being in that role. According to the American Psychological Association, caregiving isn't limited to adults. Surprisingly, 1.3 to 1.4 million American children between the ages of eight and 18 are reported as caregivers.

Caregiving can be rewarding, but it can also be stressful and exhausting. It can bring about emotional, financial, psychological, and physical strain as caregivers often give time, money, and mental and physical energy to caring for their loved ones. They frequently neglect their own needs, which puts them at high risk of developing chronic conditions. Because of this, it is essential to provide support for those who are taking care of others.

Consider these four tips.

1. **Use coping strategies** – Worry and fear are normal emotions when a loved one is diagnosed with a chronic illness. Having a range of healthy coping strategies, including good sleep, meditation, exercise, etc., and knowing when to seek assistance from a professional to manage emotional reactions can be helpful for processing and coping with caregiving.
2. **Make time for yourself** – It's easy to let caregiving take over your life and free time, but it can be unhealthy. Many caregivers face a lack of time and energy because of caregiving. They also struggle and feel guilty leaving the person they care for behind when it's time to go. Work to find a

balance of caregiving and personal time. Schedule it, and make sure when the time comes to leave, you treat it like an appointment so you have time to rejuvenate.

3. **Reach out to others** – Whether it is a trusted friend, a peer support group, or a mental health professional, talk to someone you feel safe with. It is important to work through the anxieties and stressors of being a caregiver and still feel connected to social relationships. Don't hesitate to contact friends and family when you need help and support. Be clear about what you need, set boundaries, and be willing to accept help.
4. **Use Available Resources** – Seek resources to help make your load more manageable. For example, ask your medical provider, the patient's social worker, or your local Health Department for local caregiver support services. Search online databases such as the national database www.211.org or Utah-specific databases such as dspd.utah.gov/find-a-community-resource. You can also contact other caregivers who may know of resources.

Many Americans are taking on the common yet cumbersome role of caregiving. Caring for friends and loved ones can be rewarding, but it is also important to support yourself when providing care. This can include using your coping strategies, making time for yourself, reaching out to others, and finding and using available resources.

To see the full article with citations and additional information on helping provide care for caregivers (to be published on July 30), visit relationships.usu.edu.

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