

Is caring for an aging loved one taking its toll? Get the help you need.

There are many joys in caregiving – it's a powerful way to demonstrate how important someone is to you. It gives you a chance to learn more about the person you love.

Still, no matter how much you love the person you care for, your patience will be tested. You could be increasingly annoyed by having to answer the same question 50 times a day, seven days a week for someone with dementia. Perhaps you're frustrated by your mom's continued insistence that she can handle the bills herself (and ongoing failure to actually pay them). Maybe you feel overwhelmed every time you visit and see all of the household chores that your loved one is not taking care of. You feel like you're losing your spouse when he may not remember your first date or be able to participate in decision-making.

Being attuned to shifts like these and the related stressors are your best tools for staying afloat despite the ever-changing tides. Accepting your own limitations and acknowledging your right as a caregiver to live a healthy and balanced life often requires reaching out to others for support and guidance. When you find that you need additional assistance, [contacting a Family Caregiver Specialist at the Area Agency on Aging](#) can be an invaluable part of keeping joy in the relationship with your loved one.

If you're taking care of a loved one, who's taking care of you?

Taking time for yourself amid a caregiving situation seems insurmountable, perhaps even a silly idea made up by a very unrealistic person. As your loved one's needs pile up, just getting through the day could take every ounce of physical and emotional energy you have. If the health consequences of not caring for yourself weren't so high, self-care would be a luxury. But it isn't. Caregivers who don't refuel will find themselves crashing and their loved ones left without them.

Here are some simple ideas to start a self-care plan.

- 1. Ask for help.** For many people, this is not easy. But remember, no one person has all the skills and energy to care for someone else. When you have children, you rely on neighbors and friends to babysit, teachers to provide education, and doctors to keep tabs on health. Caring for each other is a community's greatest strength. Tap into that and ask for what you need.
- 2. Allow yourself to feel.** Caring for a loved one produces lots of feelings, resentment, anger, love, grace, and joy. Feelings make you human, and it's your humanity and desire to take care of a loved one that will get you through. Understanding your own feelings can help you understand your loved ones. Share your caregiving experiences by talking to a good friend, seeking a support group, writing, or whatever works. You will increase your well-being and improve your coping skills. Being kinder to yourself equals being kinder to your loved one.

- 3. Take a deep breath.** A simple thing, but one that gives you power. When your loved one asks you the same question for the tenth time, breathe in aggravation, and let it out with a deep sigh. Now you can say, “Yes dear?” and mean it.
- 4. Make self-care lists.** Create a list of things you love to do. Start writing down one thing you can do this week, just for yourself. List one place you can go. List one book you can read. List one song you can sing. Keep making lists and be sure to put calling a Family Caregiver Specialist close to the top.

Land of Sky Regional Council's Family Caregiver Support Program provides information, assistance, and support to family members and friends who are caring for an aging loved one or someone with Alzheimer's disease. Call today and get the support and information you need and deserve!