



Caregivers Need to Take Time to Care for Themselves

But if you want to provide good care, you must also take care of yourself, says a University of Wisconsin-Extension family living educator.

Studies have found that caregivers are at increased risk of depression, anxiety and other health problems. We can't stop chronic illness in others, but we can be responsible for our own care. If we don't take care of ourselves, it's impossible to effectively take care of others, says Sheila Koca.

Some suggestions Koca offers to caregivers to help them to better care for their physical, emotional and mental health include:

1. Take responsibility for your personal well-being and getting your own needs met.
 - This means maintaining your own relationships and activities that have meaning and bring happiness or fulfillment to your life.
 - It also means having regular health care checks, eating a balanced diet, and getting enough sleep and exercise.
2. Have realistic expectations of both yourself and the person you are caring for.
 - You need to get complete information about that person's condition so you know what he or she realistically can and cannot do. If you have unrealistic expectations, you are setting yourself up for failure, resentment and guilt.
3. Focus on what you can do and change.
 - You can't change a person's illness, but you can control your response to it. You have to accept some things, while letting go of issues out of your own control.
4. Communicate effectively with others, including family members, friends, and caregiving professionals.
 - Others cannot support you if they don't know what you need. Most people are willing to offer help, if they know what the other person needs.
5. Learn from your emotions.
 - Realize that there will be ups and downs to care giving. Repressing and denying negative feelings can cause irritability, depression, physical problems, and lack of energy.
 - Denying problems can affect judgment and the ability to make sound decisions..
6. Get help when you need it.
 - An important part of caring for oneself is finding help when you can't to it yourself, whether it's in the community, with family, friends or professionals.
 - Don't wait until you are overwhelmed and exhausted. Reaching out for help is a sign of personal strength.
7. Set goals and work toward them.
 - Seek solutions to problems. You may not have to make major changes in your life in order to make a difference in how you cope with your role as a caregiver~.

I think it is so important to remember you are not alone as a caregiver, Koca says. You may have a hard time asking for help, but you may never get the support you need if you don't ask for it.

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