



Nascentia 
Health
TOMORROW'S HEALTHCARE TODAY

Self-Care Tools for Caregivers



Caregivers Need Care Too

Caring for a loved one can be both a very rewarding and a very stressful experience. Whether you are caring for an aging parent, spouse, child, or other loved one, you will likely find yourself facing challenges you never expected. While it can be overwhelming at times, there are helpful coping strategies and resources that can help make the process more manageable.

It's common to sometimes feel overwhelmed by the demands of everyday life, especially as a primary caregiver. Daily stresses and how we handle them significantly affect our emotional well-being and happiness. When was the last time, you focused on yourself and your needs? For many of us, we have to stop and think about that question as it's been a long time. Self-care greatly contributes to overall emotional well-being and happiness and must be a priority.

Focusing on your own needs and mental health is important for staying balanced and healthy. The seven quick tips in this booklet can help keep you mindful about managing stress and doing your best job as a caregiver.

Focus on “balance over burnout” by tending to your own needs as well as those of your loved one.



Bring Joy Into Your Life

Caregivers deserve care too! Find activities that make you happy and carve out time to enjoy them regularly. Whether that means watching your favorite show, reading a good book, treating yourself to a manicure, having lunch with friends, or just going for a walk, making time for yourself is critical to maintaining a healthy balance.

Do one special, meaningful thing every day just for you. Finding time for yourself is often the last thought on your mind and it's easy to find excuses for not doing so. However, taking time for yourself, even if it is only 15 minutes, is the most important gift to yourself for stress reduction.



Stress Release is Key

There will be many times that you feel stressed, and it's important to know that this is completely normal. Find ways to help relieve the stress both in the short term and long term.

For example, try breathing in slowly for 6 seconds, holding your breath for 6 seconds, and then breathing out for 6 seconds. This simple exercise can help you relax and feel more centered.

Don't bottle your feelings in. Talking through stressful experiences with your doctor, counselor, or even a good friend can offer the increased support and assistance necessary to achieve balance and peace of mind.



Live a Healthy Lifestyle

It is important to take care of your own physical and mental wellness through a healthy lifestyle. Talk to your physician or mental health professional about ways you can meet goals like eating a healthy diet, getting enough exercise, and staying mentally fit. Start with small, achievable changes that build toward a healthier overall lifestyle—like taking a short walk a few times a week or eating another serving of fruits and vegetables—and celebrate every victory.

Also, work toward increasing your intake of water for good hydration and energy every day. Identify how much caffeine you consume daily and work toward replacing those beverages with water. That small change alone will lead to increased energy, positive sleep patterns, and help you feel better overall.



Accept Help

Everyone has limitations and it's important to acknowledge them and know that it is normal and healthy to need and accept help.

Build a network of people and agencies who can take some of the burden off you as a primary caregiver. Don't be afraid to seek help when you need it. Stress and emotionality impact your quality of life. Asking for or accepting help is a healthy way to manage the challenges you're facing.

If a friend or family member offers to help so you can have some time off, accept their kindness. They care about you and your loved one and allowing them to help makes them feel good too. Even if they can't physically care for your loved one, they can help with errands and household chores or just come over to socialize and talk.

Don't be afraid to reach out to your network to see if someone can help you out with a task. You may be surprised by how many people are willing to lend a hand and how much of a weight they can lift off of you.



Take Advantage of Services

Numerous government agencies, institutions, and nonprofits offer programs that can support you and your loved one. Check with your local Office of the Aging to see what services are available to you and your loved one, including professional caregivers, respite care programs, Meals on Wheels, and adult medical and social day programs. Contact your loved one's insurer to see what benefits they may be eligible for that they are not currently receiving, such as a home health aide or nurse. Many insurance companies can help monitor your loved one's medical needs and help you navigate the many services available within a vast health system by pairing you with a nurse care manager or nurse navigator.



Options like adult social day and respite programs can give you a few hours or several days off from caregiving. You get a well-deserved break, and your loved one benefits from a change of scenery, new activities, and the opportunity to engage with others.

Allowing someone else to care for your loved one does not mean you are not doing your job—it is a valuable opportunity for you to recharge and relieve stress.

Advance Care Planning

If you're caring for an elderly or ill individual, work with them to put together an advance care directive that documents their health care wishes so medical providers can give them the care that they've chosen. This takes the burden of making difficult health care decisions off of caregivers, family, and friends and ensures that the individual's wishes are honored.



Once decisions are made, be sure to discuss advanced directives with your physician. Include yourself in the planning and completion of your own advanced directive.

Good online resources for medical advanced planning include [FiveWishes.org](https://www.fivewishes.org) and [TheConversationProject.org](https://www.theconversationproject.org). New York state has a health care proxy that you can access online or through a physician's office. This legal, simple, and convenient option is available at health.ny.gov/professionals/patients/health_care_proxy. Stay organized with all the paperwork that accumulates as you care for your loved one. Write down your questions to ask the doctor and keep everything in one place, including a calendar for appointments. Organization reduces stress and empowers positive and informed decision making.

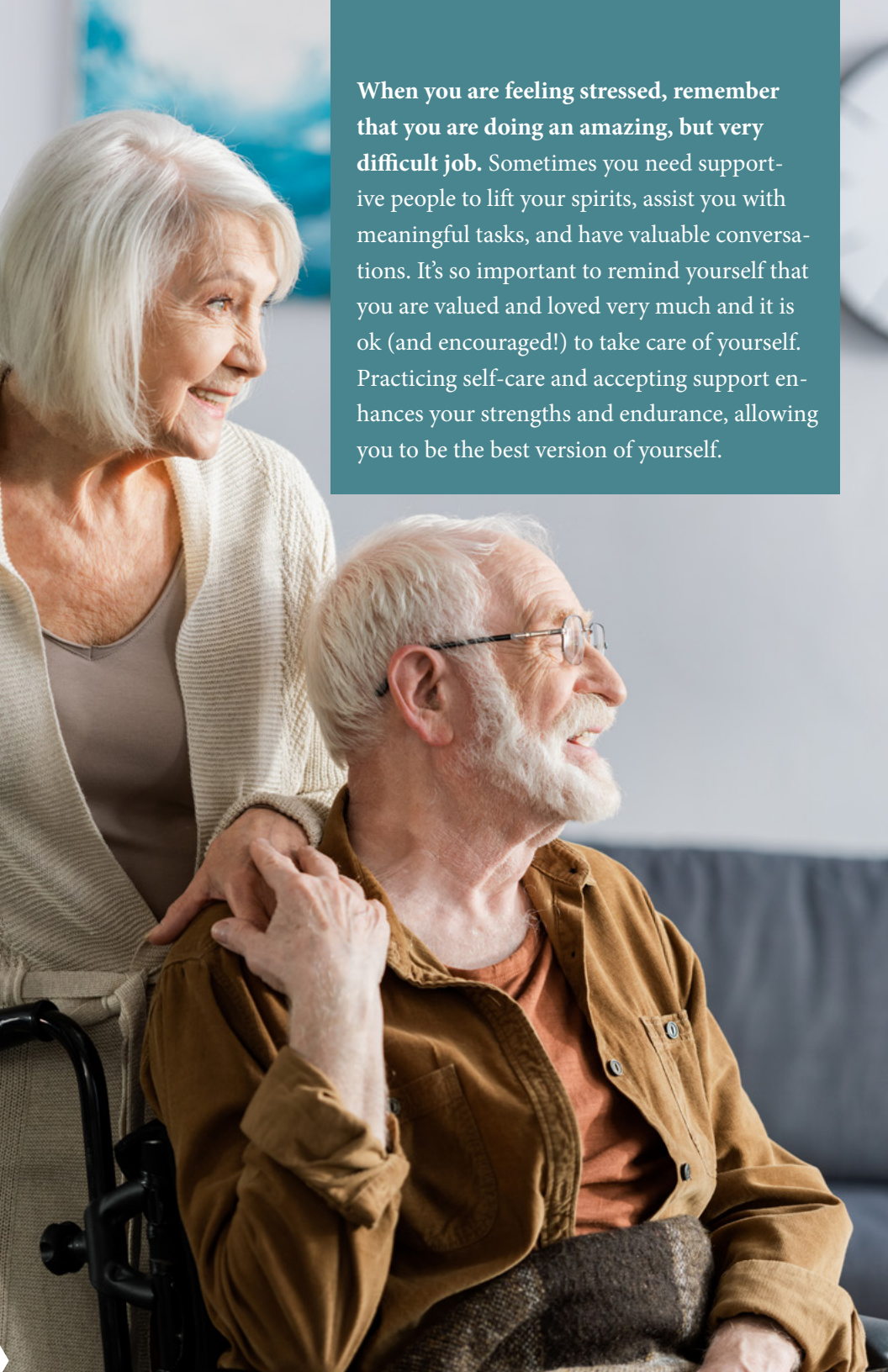
Focus on Gratitude

Being a caregiver is tough, so focus on the good things around you to keep yourself motivated and grounded. When you feel overwhelmed, think about at least one thing that you are grateful for and how it is a positive in your life.

Every morning, take a minute when you first wake up to think about things and people in your life that you are grateful for or make you happy and remain focused on those thoughts all day.

Throughout the day, find opportunities to step back from what is making you feel stressed and think about something that you are looking forward to, such as plans to meet up with a friend, a movie or TV show you're excited to watch, a special meal you're treating yourself to, or a project you're proud to finish. Even little things can help lift your spirits and remind you of the good things in your life.





When you are feeling stressed, remember that you are doing an amazing, but very difficult job. Sometimes you need supportive people to lift your spirits, assist you with meaningful tasks, and have valuable conversations. It's so important to remind yourself that you are valued and loved very much and it is ok (and encouraged!) to take care of yourself. Practicing self-care and accepting support enhances your strengths and endurance, allowing you to be the best version of yourself.



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(315) 476-4295

nascentiahealth.org

Caregiver Respite Program

Through support from the New York State Office for the Aging, Nascentia Health offers a Caregiver Respite Program to assist family caregivers in Onondaga County. We arrange for or provide our own trusted and trained professionals to watch over your loved ones at home, an adult social day program, or in a facility so that you can take a needed break to care for yourself and others.

- + Temporary respite care up to 24 hours a day for 42 days (6 weeks) per year in an appropriate level of care, such as:
 - + Adult home
 - + Assisted living facility
 - + Nursing home
 - + Adult social day program
 - + In-home aide service
- Payment is based on the care recipient's ability to pay. Participants are asked to make a voluntary contribution based on their financial ability.