



THE 7C'S OF SELF-CARE

Whether you are caring for patients as a professional, or are helping a friend or family member who is ill, disabled or elderly, take care! Caregiving is a rewarding, yet often arduous journey that takes a toll on body, mind and spirit. You need to care for yourself as you care for others. Follow "The 7C's of Self-Care" to help preserve your health, well-being and capacity to care.

C1: CLAIM YOUR CAREGIVER ROLE AND CONFIRM THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE

16 million Americans are professional caregivers, the paid staff or volunteers who work in healthcare, long-term care, faith-based or community organizations. 65 million are family caregivers, unpaid individuals helping family, friends and neighbors who are ill, disabled, elderly, or special-needs children. Their compassion and commitment provide health, help and healing, but often at a personal cost to the caregiver.

- Are you a caregiver? If you assist others in any of these ways, yes, you are a caregiver:
 - Provide physical care: feed, bathe, dress, groom, toilet or help with walking.
 - Provide emotional or social support: help with behavior, moods, socializing or making decisions.
 - Manage personal affairs: medicine, finances, legal, insurance, transportation or care coordination.
 - Manage household affairs: cook, clean, shop, launder clothes, do home repairs, or help with relocation.
- Self-care is looking out for your own welfare and meeting your needs, not just those of others. It is that set of choices and actions which feel good, relieve your stress and solve your problems. Self-care protects your health and strengthens your ability to cope.

C2: CONSIDER FACTS ABOUT CAREGIVER STRESS

Protect your health and well-being by identifying sources and symptoms of your stress. Learn the basics of stress management and do what works for you.

- Stress is the self-protective way that our body responds to the demands of life.
- Stressors are the demands that create stress. Stressors come from:
 - Internal sources: physical conditions, emotions and mental expectations
 - External sources: environmental conditions and interpersonal expectations.
- Symptoms of stress appear in any of the six components of your life: physical, emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual and occupational. Stress symptoms are warning signals that indicate the need to practice self-care. If symptoms are ignored, stress-related illnesses or compassion fatigue will develop.
- Each person has their own unique set of stressors and stress symptoms. Your plan for managing stress must be tailored to fit your own unique needs.

C3: CARE FOR YOURSELF AS YOU CARE FOR OTHERS

You can't care if you can't function. Follow the six basic steps of self-care to help you solve problems



you control and live through what is beyond your control.

1. Identify your symptoms and sources of stress.
2. Adjust your attitude. Optimism and positive thinking protect against the negative affects of stress.
3. Decide on a course of action: assess whether or not you have any control over stressors.
4. No control over stressors: Use healthy self-care daily to promote a sense of well-being.
5. When you have control, or can influence stressors: Take problem-solving action.
6. Avoid stress-numbing behaviors, unhealthy ways of coping with distress.

C4: CENTER YOURSELF

Tap your inner strength and calm energy. Remember you are not a machine; be smart about conserving and replenishing your energy.

- Be true to yourself; live in accordance with your values.
- Recognize and work with your energy cycles, throughout the day, the week, the year. Allot time for respite; renew your energy in each of these time frames.
- Balance your involvement in, and detachment from caregiving responsibilities.
- Acknowledge and work through the painful or distressing aspects of caregiving.
- Eliminate what is unimportant. Simplify your life.
- Avoid toxic people and situations.
- Reenergize with deep breathing, meditation and pursuing your dreams.

C5: CHANNEL YOUR THOUGHTS

Meet caregiving challenges with optimistic thinking that affirms your strength and draws forth the positive in life. Optimists have greater strength to handle adversity, less distress and better physical and emotional health than pessimists.

- Avoid negativism around you.
- Pay attention to your thoughts. Consciously replace negative with positive thoughts.
- Don't be a Pollyanna. Face reality, plan and work to accomplish positive goals.
- Use affirmations (verbal reinforcement) and visualizations (encouraging mental pictures) to overcome negative or create positive situations in your life.

C6: CHOOSE WISELY

No one can make important caregiving choices for you. When faced with difficult or painful choices use these criteria to help you choose wisely. Ask yourself:

1. Is this a healthy choice?
2. Is this a loving choice?
3. Is this a "big rock", a priority for me or this situation?
4. Will this choice pass the "death-bed test" and seem important in the future?
5. Am I being passive and letting others choose for me?
6. Am I being honest with myself and others?
7. Am I holding on when I should be letting go?

C7: CULTIVATE COMMUNITY

Gain wisdom, energy and resilience by connecting with others. Picture those around you as a well-stocked refrigerator that can offer the nourishment you need. Follow these suggestions:

1. Feast on healthy food and treats. Look to others for fun, as well as help with problems.
2. Feed yourself. Don't wait for others to guess your needs. Ask respectfully and directly for what you need.



3. Choose dependable brands. Go to reliable supporters who are willing and able to help. Avoid those who make you feel guilty or uncomfortable for having needs.
4. Look for milk in the milk carton, not the egg carton. Ask others to do things they are good at or feel comfortable doing.
5. Go to full, not empty pitchers. Don't ask for help from those who are tapped-out or over committed. Seek support from those with a bit more time or balance in their lives.

