

7 Practical Tips for Self-Care

Courtesy of Lori Ramos Cavallo

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A caregiver's life is packed with grooming, doctor or therapy appointments, exercises and food preparation — often all before noon. That's why caregivers may experience exhaustion, depression and burnout. And advice on how to handle the job may cause them to roll their eyes and shake their heads. **Get plenty of sleep. Get regular exercise. Eat a healthy diet. Do the things you enjoy.** When life is so busy, it can be challenging to find time for any of these things.

Here are seven practical ways to find some time during your day to look after yourself, as well as your loved one.

- 1. Pre-make meals.** Weekends tend to be less hectic. Pick one day and prepare all or some of your meals for the week. You can then defrost and heat for meals during your busiest days.
- 2. Use alternative transportation.** If you work, arrange outside transportation for your loved one and meet them at the appointment. It can help reduce the time you take off from work. If you're part of the ever-growing "Sandwich Generation," become a part of a car pool for school and practices with other parents. Taking one or two trips off your plate can add at least 30 minutes to your day. You can contribute by driving every other time or offering a gas card or babysitting.
- 3. Use a pill organizer.** If your loved one takes more than one pill per day, this is a good way to save five to 10 minutes, especially when each day is different.
- 4. Make lists.** By organizing your calendar, it helps you stay on task and avoid wasting time with extra trips to the store.
- 5. Stay focused and set time limits.** As caregivers, we're often researching the newest information to help care for our loved one. Although important, it's easy to lose focus and before you know it, hours have passed and you have forgotten your original purpose. Set a time limit and start a list of interesting discoveries. Refer back to the list at another time and stay on track today.
- 6. Prepare a Care Plan.** Although time-consuming at first, it will save time once completed. When leaving your loved one in the care of someone else, reviewing a completed Care Plan should take only a few minutes versus having to go over everything — which can take up to 30 minutes.
- 7. Just say yes.** This can be the hardest thing of all! When anyone offers to help in any way, accept the offer or say thank you or, if what they've offered to do isn't something you need, offer an alternative that would help.