

# Caring for Yourself

while caring for others

## About Self-Care

Self-care is about meeting your needs so that you are completely prepared to meet the needs of your loved one. When you are caring for others, however, taking care of your own needs is usually the first to be neglected and the last to be attended to.

Often, family caregivers put up barriers to caring for themselves based on preconceived myths. Fortunately, there are no rules about self-care except it should help you feel replenished, comforted and relaxed. Below you will discover the myths about self-care, find some possible methods to recognize and reduce stress, and learn how self-care and respite care can help you give the best possible care to your loved one.

### Myths About Self-Care

*Myth: Self-care means time away from your loved one.*

Reality: Self-care can occur even while you are with your loved one.

*Myth: Self-care takes a lot of time.*

Reality: Depending on the activity, self-care can take only minutes. Reading a morning meditation may only take minutes, but the effect can last all day.

*Myth: Self-care is something you must learn to do.*

Reality: What brings you pleasure, enjoyment, relaxation, or replenishment? Choose what works for you and do it.



**HOSPICE**  
of Northeastern Illinois

### Self-Care Ideas

Below are a list of some self-care methods that can help you relieve stress.

- Keep a journal
- Play an instrument
- Take a yoga class
- Soak in a warm bath or jacuzzi
- Visit a zoo
- Watch the sunrise or sunset
- Read your favorite book
- Listen to relaxing music
- Watch a comedy
- Meditate
- Do lunch with your friends
- Plant a garden
- Cry
- Learn a craft
- Drink warm tea
- Sit by the fire
- Gaze at the sky
- Donate blood
- Take a scenic drive
- Hold a baby
- Turn off the TV
- Sit next to river or lake
- Spend time **being** with your loved one - rather than **doing**.

### Communicating with Your Loved One

When someone is dying, they may want to talk about the life they lived, their feelings of regret, pride of accomplishment, people they've known, etc. It can be a meaningful experience to stroll down memory lane with your loved one because it can lead to greater feelings of inner peace, laughter, tears or meaningful reconciliation with someone who may have become distant.

#### Do Not Say

Hi! You look great!

Be strong!

Don't cry, everything will be fine.

#### Do Say

Hi! It's nice to see you again!

Let's do something together!

Is there anything special you are craving these days?

## Techniques for Reducing Stress

**Exercise** - Even a small amount of exercise a week can help you handle your anxieties much more effectively.

**Breathe** - Taking a slow deep breath releases more oxygen into the blood stream and brain which enables you to feel relaxed.

**Talk** - Keeping your feelings bottled up inside can harm your immune system. It is important you talk to your friends, family, or an HNI care team member about your feelings.

**Limit Caffeine and Alcohol**  
Caffeine is a stimulant and too much caffeine can act in the same way as too much stress. Alcohol is a depressant and can aggravate stress.

**Eat Vitamin C-Rich Foods** - Your adrenal glands use Vitamin C during episodes of physical stress. Eat a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables to ensure your body is getting enough Vitamin C.

**Eat Protein and Complex Carbohydrates** - Your body uses more protein and complex carbohydrates when you are under stress. Eating more of these kinds of foods will help you combat stress.

## Common Signs of Caregiver Stress and Burnout

One of the first steps in caring for yourself is understanding and recognizing the signs of caregiver stress and burnout. Since your well-being is the foundation of your caregiving, it is important to be aware of the stressors in your life and your body's warning signs. Some signs to watch for include:

**Physical** - headache, muscle aches, frequent illness, sleeping and eating problems.

**Emotional** - guilt, anger, loneliness, depression and anxiety.

**Mental** - forgetfulness, difficulty making decisions, attention wandering.

**Interpersonal** - blaming, withdrawal, impatience, irritability and sensitivity to criticism.

**Spiritual** - feelings of alienation, and loss of hope, purpose or meaning.

## Hospice Respite Benefit

Respite refers to a short term level of care provided to patients under their Medicare or Medicaid Hospice Benefit. Respite gives you, the family caregiver, time and temporary relief from the stress you may experience while providing care to your loved one.

A patient can be placed on respite for up to five consecutive days. The five-day respite stays can be used as often as the patient or family caregiver needs time but cannot be used consecutively.

Respite care is paid for by a per diem rate that is provided to the contracted facility through the Medicare or Medicaid Hospice Benefit.

### Volunteer-Provided Respite

Trained HNI volunteers can provide a shorter version of respite care by relieving you from your caregiving duties for a few hours at a time.

## We're Here for You

Hospice of Northeastern Illinois is proud to accompany you through your caregiving experience. Should you have any questions or concerns, please call us at **1.800.425.4444**