

# BEING A CAREGIVER

A **caregiver** is anyone who helps another person in need. A person in need might be an ill spouse or partner, a child with a disability, or an aging friend or relative.

**Caregivers** report higher levels of stress than do people who are not caregivers. It's important for caregivers to know that they, too, need help and support.

Verses for strength:

Joshua 1:9 reads "I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go"

Philippians 4:13 reads "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"

## Signs of caregiver stress

As a caregiver, you may be so focused on your loved one that you don't see how caregiving affects your own health and well-being. The signs of caregiver stress include:

- Feeling burdened or worrying all the time.
- Feeling tired often.
- Sleeping too much or not enough.
- Gaining or losing weight.
- Becoming easily irked or angry.
- Losing interest in activities you used to enjoy.
- Feeling sad.
- Having frequent headaches or other pains or health problems.
- Misusing alcohol or drugs, including prescription medicines.
- Missing your own medical appointments.

Too much stress over time can harm your health. As a caregiver, you might feel depressed or anxious. You might not get enough sleep or physical activity.

\*source: Mayo Clinic website

# 10 TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS

## 1. Learn to Communicate Effectively

Communication is key, both with your loved one and their medical team. If you're caring for a loved one with a terminal illness (or even a disease like dementia), they will likely have a medical team or multiple doctors working with them. Learning to communicate with these doctors is essential as a caregiver. This will help you understand what you need to provide for your loved one, how you can aid in their care, and will allow you to advocate for them if need be.

As well as doctors, learning to communicate with your loved one is incredibly important too. Perhaps they've lost touch with their verbal skills, or just don't have the right words to say. Maybe you now need to rely on gestures to communicate with them effectively. Just be patient with them, and realize that they're doing their best – just like you are.

## 2. Take Care of YOU

Making time for self-care can be difficult, especially when it becomes your first instinct to put the person you are caring for above all.

This could mean actively checking in with yourself every day, making sure you see *your* doctor and reducing personal stress. Caregiving takes a toll on caregivers, but it's important to make sure your mental and physical health are priorities – you won't be able to care for your loved one if you're not healthy.

## 3. Acknowledge Your Loved One's Limitations

Your loved one may struggle with activities that they used to find enjoyable or be able to do themselves. For example – they may no longer be able to dress themselves or use the bathroom. Perhaps they may need help with bathing. No matter the task, it's important to understand these limitations and to still treat them as the person that they are – not as a patient. Even if they are unaware of the ongoing tasks you complete for them or can only recognize you when you're touching their hand, know that even with their limitations, they are still the person you love and cherish.

## 4. Accept Help from Your Community, Family and Friends

When your friends, family or community offer support – don't hesitate to accept it! Being a caregiver is a large, incredibly involved task, and sometimes it can feel like it's a massive thing to tackle alone. A common worry for caregivers is that they feel as though they are a burden on others when they ask for help – but that's actually the opposite of being true!

Tip: To help coordinate tasks like meal sign up, picking up meds, and more, [The CaringBridge Planner](#) is an all-inclusive scheduling tool to help you request and receive – support with everyday tasks. It's all there, with a time and place for each task and space for anyone who wants to help.

## 5. Be Realistic

It's important, both as a new caregiver or an experienced one, to be realistic about what your loved one is experiencing – whether it be a memory condition, disease or the process of aging.

Allowing yourself to cope with feelings of sadness is essential – and don't be afraid to consult a professional for help if you are in need of it. For some [Journaling](#) can be a helpful release for the emotions that you are feeling.

## 6. Learn How to Provide Proper Physical Care

Being a caregiver is physically demanding – especially if your loved one struggles with mobility. Learning the proper way to lift, feed and provide other forms of care for your loved one is an important piece of the caregiving process. Knowing the correct way to do caring methods will help minimize the risk of injury and the medical staff can provide that.

## 7. Be Open to New Methods of Care

Sometimes it seems as though new methods of care pop up every day! Technology is a really great tool for aiding with the care of your loved one.

New programs, like online patient portals, are secure websites that give patients convenient, 24/7 access to personal health information from anywhere with an Internet connection. These portals can help anyone responsible for the care of your loved one stay up-to-date on medical information that is shared between doctor and patient.

## 8. Stay Connected with the Outside World

When you become a caregiver, it's easy for your new responsibilities to completely take over your world. When this happens, you can find yourself feeling isolated – which could lead to symptoms of depression becoming more prevalent in your life.

Don't allow for this to happen – take some time to stay connected with the outside world – family, friends, colleagues – and talk about something other than your responsibilities as a caregiver. Remember, taking care of yourself is important for the care of your loved one, too. But time by yourself is OK as long as it's not all the time.

## 9. Get Organized

Consider all legal documents, financial obligations and care preferences, and make sure you've spoken to your loved one about them. It may seem like a difficult conversation to have at first – but you'll thank yourself later.

It helps to have these things in order sooner than later, so that if the question of a will, affording a nursing home or whether or not to hire a full-time caregiver comes up, you'll be able to have the information quickly without worrying about where to find it or how to access it.

## 10. Start a CaringBridge Site

Keeping your loved one's family and friends involved and updated is a key priority through the caregiving process. A free CaringBridge online health journal allows you to update everyone at once and offers a scheduling tool to help you coordinate caring tasks.

\*Source: Caring Bridge website

## Here's the irony: who needs more care than a caregiver?

We know it can be difficult to find the time for self-care, but it's important to remember that your own wellness is still a priority. We also know caregivers may be too burned out to think of exactly what they need, so we asked our community for suggestions.

Here are 25 tips to help you truly practice self-care:

- Let go of guilt
- Join a caregiver support group
- Stretch and breathe
- Get some laughs
- Talk to someone once a day
- Get rest
- Prioritize nutrition
- Ask for help
- Start a CaringBridge site
- Don't be afraid to say "no"
- Ask for flexibility at work
- Spend quality time with friends and family
- Take time for spiritual practices/meditation
- Keep a gratitude journal
- Find time for exercise
- Reduce caffeine intake
- Listen to music
- Treat yourself
- Make time for your hobbies
- Play with a furry friend
- Read books
- Create self-love mantras
- Consider professional help
- Don't make self-care another "to-do"
- Be kind to yourself

# RESOURCES FOR THE CAREGIVER

**AARP WEBSITE:** <https://www.aarp.org/caregiving>

**Family Caregiving**

Basics · Care at Home · Nursing Homes · Medical · Financial & Legal · Life Balance · Community · Local Resources & Solutions · Stories

**CAREGIVER RESOURCE CENTER**  
Helping you navigate your role as a family caregiver

**CONNECT WITH US**  
AARP Caregiving Community  
AARP Caregivers Facebook Group  
AARP Caregiving Support Line

**FINANCIAL**  
Costs of Caregiving  
Getting Paid for Caregiving  
Managing Loved One's Money  
Paying a Caregiver  
Public Benefits  
Tapping Your Assets  
Tax Tips

**LIFE BALANCE**  
Adult Day Care  
Caregiver Burnout  
Family Conflict  
Family Leave — Federal Law  
Family Leave — State Laws  
Long-Distance Caregiving  
Respite Care  
Support Groups  
Valuable Apps  
Working Caregivers

**MOBILITY**  
Giving Up Driving  
Mobility-Friendly Car Accessories  
Mobility Problems  
Transportation

**DEMENTIA**

CHAT

**CARING BRIDGE WEBSITE:** <https://www.caringbridge.org/resources/tips-for-caregivers>

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**MAYO CLINIC WEBSITE:** <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/caregiver-stress>

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**Healthy Lifestyle**  
Stress management Print

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**Caregiver stress: Tips for taking care of yourself**  
Caring for a loved one strains even the most resilient people. If you're a caregiver, take steps to preserve your own health and well-being.

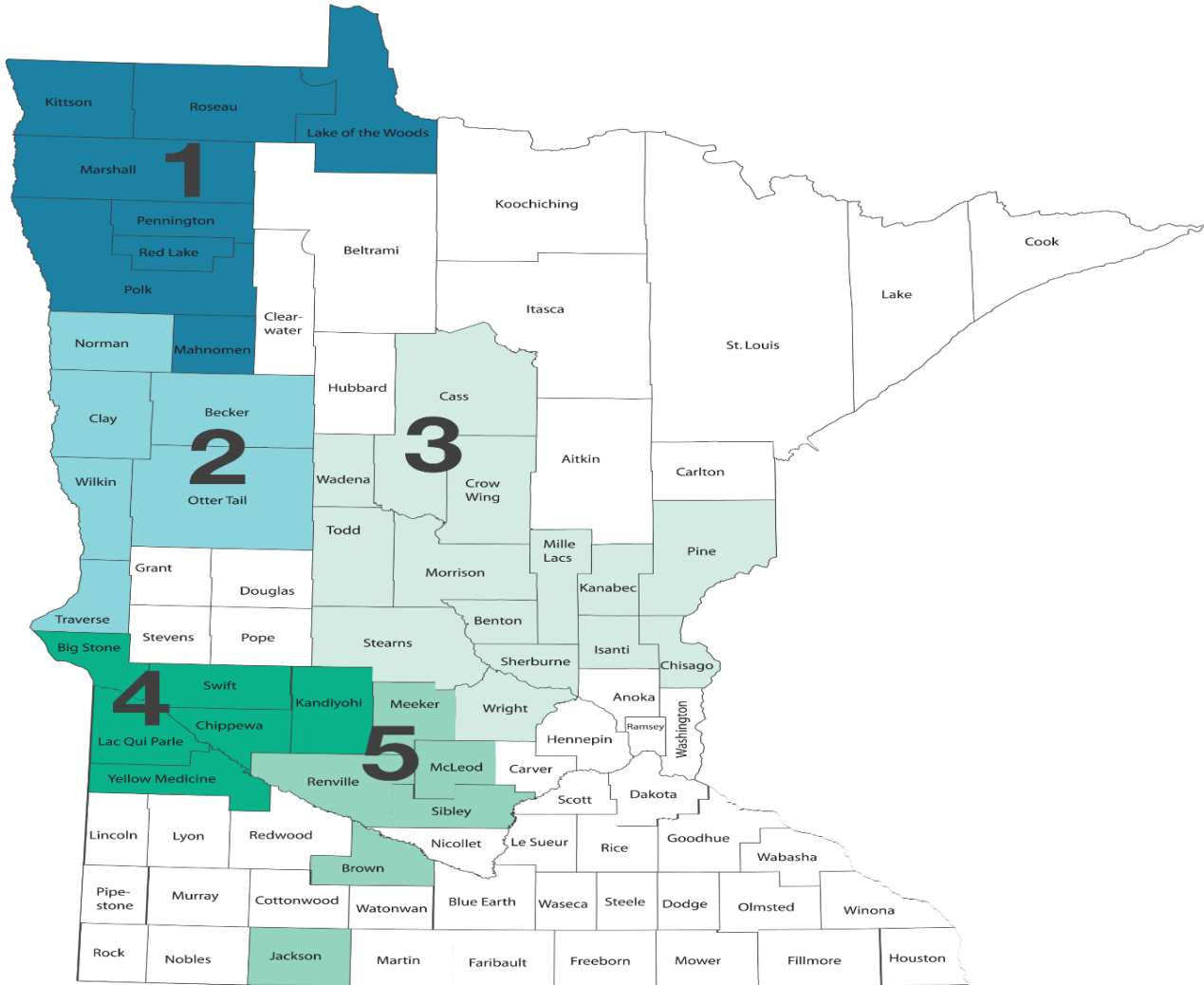
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/ OLDER ADULTS /

## Caregiver Support Groups



### East Central & Central – Region 3

Mary Smith

[Mary.Smith@lssmn.org](mailto:Mary.Smith@lssmn.org)

218.203.7312

*Serving counties: Benton, Cass, Chisago, Crow Wing, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, Morrison, Pine, Sherburne, Stearns, Todd, Wadena and Wright.*