

Taking Care of the Caregiver

Being a caregiver can be exhausting, both physically and emotionally. Many caregivers find it much easier to focus on their loved one's needs, and neglect their own. Regardless of age, sex, race and ethnicity, caregivers report the following health concerns: exhaustion, poor eating habits, failure to exercise, postponing or missing medical appointments, anxiety, stress, isolation, depression, and frustration. Additionally, caregivers are at increased risk for excessive use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Studies show that an estimated 46-59 percent of caregivers are clinically depressed.

If you are a caregiver, it is essential to find the time and resources to take care of your own physical and mental health. Taking care of yourself first is the only way you can continue to effectively care for your loved one. Remember, giving your all does not mean giving up your own health and well-being. You can develop skills for coping with the challenges of being a caregiver. Here are some suggestions you may find helpful:

Take time for yourself

- Let yourself be alone for a short time to clear your head. Gaston Hospice volunteers can be used to provide respite care so that you can take a much-needed break.
- Get out for a breath of fresh air or a change of scenery—even a brief walk can make a difference.
- Exercise has many benefits—it promotes better sleep, reduces tension and depression, lifts spirits and increases energy. Think of ways you can fit exercise into your daily routine.
- Relax in a warm bathtub, read a book, or listen to music.
- Go to a movie or have lunch with a friend.

Let others take part in the work of caregiving

- Learn to accept and ask for help, especially from family, friends, and community. This will help you, plus, others won't feel so powerless when they feel included by doing something, anything, to help.
- Make a list of tasks and put them in order, according to what is important for you to be involved in, as opposed to things you can ask someone else to do. Then you can offer specific ways that others can help, like making meals, running errands, sitting with your loved one, or taking the children out.
- Gaston Hospice volunteers are also available to help you with these tasks.

Seek and accept support for yourself.

- Talk to friends and family about your feelings. All feelings are legitimate, even those that upset you (anger, sadness, guilt). It is healthy to cry and express emotions.

- A support group can help relieve tension, give a new perspective on the situation, increase understanding, and build support. Some groups are oriented to specific diseases like cancer, Parkinson's Disease, or Alzheimer's Disease.
- Find ways to care for your spiritual self. Whether or not you are affiliated with a particular religion, seeking guidance from someone who shares your spiritual outlook can help.

Additional information can be found at www.caregiver.org.