

## Long-term Caregiving: Staying Emotionally Well over the Long-Term

You may or may not have come into family caregiving with perspective, willingness, stamina and a support system. Because of this it becomes important to self-evaluate. Usually, people rush in to offer help and then spend a lot of energy learning quickly how to pull together resources - medical or social or financial - without even thinking of the bigger picture. Though this is admirable and thoroughly lovely, the downside is when family caregivers stay in this state of urgency.

Why is this a problem? As a psychotherapist and someone who has worked with caregivers over 2 decades, I witness people burning out, struggling, and becoming immersed in helping other people live their lives more fully, at the expense of their own lives. This is truly tricky and difficult to manage, especially because of the steep-learning curve that most caregivers have to become adept at managing. You need to learn what the issues are that require you to respond fully and quickly (i.e. life/death 911 emergencies) and what the issues are that are more about quality of life, such as preferences.

Given this need and desire to stay emotionally well, may I encourage you to prepare yourself as if you were a runner in a long-distance race. Even if you think and “know” that being a family caregiver will only be for a short period, I recommend strongly that you develop your stamina. Situations change at the drop of a hat. Because of this, if you have developed the strength to stay steady given whatever arises both you and the person you are caring for will fare better as will everyone in your life.

So, I am curious, have you ever had to develop resiliency before? Trained for a marathon? Had to quickly learn many avenues that might not be in your repertoire? Family caregivers run into this frequently.

Tips for staying emotionally well over the long-term:

1. Pace Yourself
2. Delegate
3. Choose what is the most important aspect of caring to do and keep yourself to that.
4. Hydrate!
5. Eat well!
6. Sleep!
7. Pace yourself (yes, I know that I said this before; it deserves repetition)
8. Remind yourself that you are choosing to care for this person
9. Read Manuel Smith's *"10 Assertiveness Rights for Humans!"*

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