

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Self-Care Strategies for Family and Friend Caregivers



Family Caregivers
of British Columbia

— Let us help —

1-877-520-3267

Caring for Yourself

Family caregiving can start gradually or as part of a crisis and it is not usually predictable. Taking on the role of a caregiver often happens when life is already full and is squeezed into a busy life without letting anything else go. Caregiving can be one of the most rewarding gifts you can give to another person, while also being emotionally and physical demanding.

So, what exactly does self-care look like for a busy, multi-tasking caregiver?

Self-care strategies are deeply personal and unique for each caregiver. However, all self-care practices have a common thread of knowing oneself. Self-care includes acknowledging how you feel and seeing and hearing yourself in the situation. It also includes identifying what comfort will meet your needs and then integrating any activity that creates a sense of well-being.

Self-care strategies touched upon in this guide are self-awareness and self-compassion, creating connections and personal supports and health dimension planning.

Self-awareness is the foundation of self-care. This means being aware of your internal state and monitoring your inner thoughts and emotions as they arise. It can be helpful to turn inward to understand how you can best implement self-care strategies. Consider, what will support me in this moment? It may be a long walk or a rest. Self-care can be calling a friend or saying 'yes; or 'no' to a social event. Actively engaging in self-care practices can help meet your own needs, while supporting you to feel more grounded as you care for others.

“Self-compassion is crucial for caregivers- not only because it helps us forgive ourselves for inevitable mistakes, but also because it allows us to acknowledge and comfort ourselves for the difficulties of our caregiving role.”

Dr. Kristin Neff is a world leading expert and researcher on self-compassion and states that self-compassion is shown to lead to more satisfaction when caring for someone and decreases the chances of burnout. Neff explains there are three parts of self-compassion: self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness. Self-kindness is first acknowledging your hurt, suffering or pain. Being kind to yourself includes reminding yourself, “while I can provide a



certain level of care, I cannot do everything by myself – ALL people have limitations.” Common humanity involves recognizing that all humans are imperfect, fail and make mistakes. This can sound like, “I am human, I am fallible and going to make mistakes like everyone else. This is difficult and anyone would be struggling with this.” Lastly, it is important for caregiver to be mindful of their feelings, especially the painful and negative ones. When you can acknowledge life is imperfect and hold space for yourself in difficult times, you will feel better about aspects of your life.

Connecting with other caregivers and allowing others to share in the care is an important part of self-care. A large challenge for caregivers is isolation. Caregivers are busy and juggling many roles and responsibilities and few make time for friends. Asking for help takes practice as we are not often comfortable as individuals and as a society to reach out to others for support. However, caregiving is not something that can be accomplished alone, at least not for very long.

It is sometimes hard to let go of control, but sharing the care makes caregiving sustainable. Both you and the person you care for will benefit from having a network to rely on. Suggestions for getting support are: make a list of daily/weekly tasks to be done and ask people to commit to tasks you are willing to let them do and they are willing to do, contact community organizations that provide respite services for caregivers and address any feelings of guilt you may have when you reach out and ask for help. You may find support in attending a caregiver support group, either in-person or virtually.

Dimensions of health include, emotional, spiritual, social, intellectual and physical. What do these areas of health mean to you? To provide you a deeper understanding of dimensions of health, here is a breakdown of each area.

Emotional health is linked to feeling good about oneself, self-awareness, coping skills, and communications skills. Social health is having stable and satisfying relationships (community, family and friends), support systems (formal and informal), and activities and socializing.

Intellectual well-being includes learning and education, flexing your mind muscle through active learning or creativity.

Physical health includes fitness, nutrition, sleep, fragility scale, medical care, lifestyle and genetics.

And *spirituality* is believing in a purpose greater than oneself and making meaning of one's life. This includes having love, hope, faith and charity, such as being of service to others or participating in activities and communities of faith.

As you explore these various aspects of your own well-being, consider what needs your attention the most. What are you already doing? Is there an area that you can add to or refine? Are there blocks to making a change and what support do you need to make changes? As you reflect on your practices of self-care and continue to integrate self-care strategies, we encourage you to celebrate your successes and learn from your mistakes



“Authenticity is a collection of choices that we have to make every day. It’s about the choice to show up and be real. The choice to be honest. The choice to let our true selves be seen.”

— Brene Brown

Exploring Dimensions of Health

Here is a suggestion to review your current self-care practices and to consider how you might continue to develop them: Pick one dimension of health to focus on each week, consider possible action steps and write out the step for that one action in the table.

Each dimension of your health is inter-connected and while you consider them here one at a time, we know that well-being is related to the inter-connected aspects of ourselves, which include all these dimensions together.

Health Dimensions	Current Activities	Goals/Wishes	Needs
Physical			
Intellectual			
Social			
Emotional			
Spiritual			

Caregiver Self-Assessment

Start by responding to the statements below to recognize the positive steps you are already taking to ensure you stay healthy, and to identify areas where you might consider action to help keep you resilient.

I am satisfied with my overall personal health. Yes No

I have the skills and information I need in order to give the required care. Yes No

I maintain regular contact with family and friends and make time to spend with them. Yes No

I can ask for help and accept help when it is offered. Yes No

I can communicate effectively with the person I am caring for, as well as with others involved in their care. Yes No

I am aware of community resources that are available to help support me in my caregiver role. Yes No

I am aware of caregiver support groups (locally or online) and/or have a supportive network where I can share my challenges and successes. Yes No

I make use of respite options available and take breaks away from my caregiving responsibilities. Yes No

I have gathered information about the progression of my care recipient's disease so I know what to expect and can prepare in advance as best I can. Yes No

I know how to navigate the healthcare system and who to ask if, and when, I need help. Yes No

Your Score

8-10 Points

You are already taking several important actions to take care of yourself and make sure caregiving is sustainable for you. Look closely at any statements where you answered “No,” and consider whether accessing more resources would be helpful for you.

5-7 Points

You understand the importance of self-care, but you’re not always able to take action to support yourself. Consider any barriers you have to self-care and ask yourself whether these are external (you don’t know about the resources that exist to help you) or internal (you have trouble asking for and receiving support). Sharing the care is essential to finding enough time and energy for yourself. Choose one statement where you responded “No” to work on this week.

Fewer than 5 Points

Without contributing to your own well-being, caregiving quickly becomes overwhelming and unsustainable. Use this list of ten statements as a guide to creating a self-care plan and start with learning more about the caregiver support resources available to guide you. It will be important for you to identify resources you’re not currently using in your social circle, such as family, friends, acquaintances and neighbours, to share the care and create some much-needed space for addressing your own wellbeing.

“Self-care is not about self-indulgence,
it’s about self-preservation.”

— Audrey Lorde



I can't thank you enough for taking the time to speak with me and for the valuable information you have provided.

—Caregiver Support Line User

We are here to support you

For [emotional support or questions](#) related to caregiving call our toll-free line (BC) at 1-877-520-3267. We are available Mon-Fri, 8:30am- 4pm. When you call our Support Line, we will talk you through whatever is on your mind. If we feel you could benefit from more one to one support, we will refer you to our [1:1 Caregiver Coaching for more complex situations](#).

To receive news and information by email, [sign up](#) for our Caregiver Connect newsletter and monthly enews.

[Join a family caregiver support group](#). We are also continually expanding our list of community caregiver support groups around BC. [Find one near you and get together with people who “get it”](#). Learn from other family caregivers and share your advice to help others.

Doing everything on your own can make you feel like you're alone. It helps to have someone to talk to.

Family Caregiving:
Don't do it alone.



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