

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

SELF-CARE STRATEGIES FOR FAMILY AND FRIEND CAREGIVERS



**Family Caregivers
of British Columbia**

— **Let us help** —

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. It involves being mindful of your internal state and monitoring your thoughts and emotions as they arise. Turning inward can help you understand how to best implement self-care strategies. Ask yourself, What will support me in this moment? It might be taking a walk or resting. Self-care can also involve calling a friend or deciding whether to say 'yes' or 'no' to a social event. Actively engaging in self-care practices helps meet your needs while also allowing 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 greater satisfaction when caring for someone and decreases the chances of burnout. Neff explains that there are three parts of self-compassion: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Self-kindness involves 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 I will make mistakes like everyone else. This is difficult, and anyone would be struggling with this.” Lastly, it is important for caregivers to be mindful of their feelings, especially the painful and negative ones. When you can acknowledge that 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, juggling many roles and responsibilities, and few make time for friends. Asking for help takes practice, as we are often uncomfortable, both as individuals and as a society, with reaching 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 include: making a list of daily/weekly tasks to be done and asking people to commit to tasks you are willing to let them do and they are willing to do; contacting community organizations that provide respite services for caregivers; and addressing 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

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

Emotional health is linked to feeling good about oneself, self-awareness, coping skills, and communication. Nurturing emotional health helps build resilience and strengthens relationships.

Social health involves having stable and satisfying relationships (with community, family, and friends), support systems (both formal and informal), and engaging in activities and socializing.

Intellectual health includes learning, exercising your mind through creativity and active engagement. Whether through reading, hobbies, or discussions, intellectual health stimulates the mind and fosters personal growth.

Physical health encompasses fitness, nutrition, sleep, fragility scale, medical care, lifestyle, and genetics. Taking care of your physical health supports overall well-being and enhances your energy and vitality.

Spiritual health is believing in a purpose greater than oneself and finding meaning in 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 you can enhance or refine? Are there blocks to making a change, and what support do you need to make those 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, and the choice to let our true selves be seen."

—Brené Brown, Writer and Professor

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

To begin this exercise, start by reflecting on the statements below. This will help you recognize the positive steps you're already taking to stay healthy and identify areas where you might consider taking further action to support your resilience as a caregiver. By completing this exercise, you'll gain a clearer understanding of your strengths and where you may need additional support to continue thriving in your caregiving role.

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 Lord, Writer and Philosopher



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

Reach out to us for support

What you can do right now and how we can help

For [emotional support or questions](#) related to caregiving, call our toll-free line (BC) at 1-877-520-3267. We're available Monday to Friday, from 8:30 AM to 4:00 PM. When you call our Support Line, we listen as you share whatever is on your mind. Our goal is to listen with compassion, recognizing that while there are common themes, each caregiving experience is unique, and so are the needs.

If we feel you could benefit from more personalized support or are navigating a complex situation, we can refer you to our [1:1 Caregiver Coaching for more tailored assistance](#). Check to see if you qualify.

We know it can be overwhelming to navigate websites and links, so we've streamlined the process to focus on the most common caregiver concerns, including well-being, financial info, health care navigation, and more.

To receive news and updates directly to your inbox, [sign up](#) for our newsletter and e-news.

Listen to our prerecorded webinars. These free educational sessions address high-priority questions. You can also listen to our podcast, Caregivers Out Loud.

Join a [Family Caregiver Support Group](#). Learn from other family caregivers and share your advice to help others.



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