



Benton
Hospice
Service

CARING FOR A LOVED ONE? DON'T NEGLECT YOURSELF

To Your Health (Gazette-Times, Democrat-Herald)
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by BHS Social Services Staff

Caring for a loved one through a chronic or terminal illness is an act of loyalty, love and devotion. It can also be one of the most challenging tasks you will ever face.

Being responsible for another's daily care is time-consuming, stressful, and often exhausting. The physical, mental, and emotional demands of providing care can affect your own health.

To be a successful caregiver, you must learn not only how to care for your loved one, but how to take care of yourself, too.

First, you need to understand how to provide care that is appropriate for your loved one's condition and needs. For example, lifting or moving a person without causing discomfort to the patient or to yourself is an important skill. Understanding when, where, why, and how to give medications is critical to good care as well.

Using special equipment and supplies can also ease the strain of caregiving. Depending on your situation, some or all of the following might be helpful:

- ◆ Phones or intercom systems—baby monitors work well
- ◆ Nightlights in bedrooms and hallways
- ◆ Over-bed tables for eating or reading
- ◆ Transfer boards for getting in and out of bed or a car
- ◆ Hand-held showers, bathseats, and nonskid mats to help with bathing
- ◆ Grab bars near the toilet or tub
- ◆ Raised toilet seats, or bedside commodes
- ◆ Walkers, wheelchairs, canes

If you're not sure what equipment and supplies would be beneficial, you can request a home safety evaluation through your physician.

A physical or occupational therapist will come to your home, assess the situation, and make recommendations for improving safety for your loved one and for you.

As a caregiver, you may often feel isolated, frustrated, and even resentful. These are common caregiver experiences. There are many small, simple things you can do to stay alert, energized and connected which may minimize stress.

- ◆ Get enough rest and exercise
- ◆ Eat healthy foods, limiting sugar, sodium, and fatty foods
- ◆ Take time to have fun: schedule regular breaks; maintain your own interests
- ◆ Learn breathing exercises or meditation techniques to manage stress
- ◆ Focus on a good thing that happened during the day

- ◆ Find a support group to help process your experience and locate resources
- ◆ Be honest about your limits and request help when needed
- ◆ Learn to accept support and encouragement from those around you

Stepping out of your role as a caregiver from time to time is also an important part of providing good care. Making time to be a husband or wife, parent or child, life partner or friend keeps the relationship between you and your loved one strong. If you don't have a friend or another family member who can provide this respite, consider hiring a part-time caregiver.

Above all, be gentle with yourself. Taking care of someone you love through an illness is challenging. But with a little planning and good self-care, it can be one of the most satisfying and rewarding experiences of your life.

Visit www.caringinfo.org or www.caregiving.org for more information on providing care for a loved one.