

# The Caregiver's To Do List

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When you are caring for another person, you may find yourself with a long “To Do” list on a regular basis. Lists can be very helpful in keeping you organized and reminding you of tasks to complete. However, although their lists are filled with things to do for other people, caregivers often forget to include some of the most important tasks of all—the ones that will enhance and protect *their own* physical and emotional well-being. Below are some “to do’s” that you may want to place on your list.

- ◆ **Breathe.** You may be breathing enough to keep you alive, but odds are you aren’t breathing deeply enough to keep your body energized and your mind clear. Try breathing in through your nose, inflating your belly, then exhaling slowly through your mouth as your belly deflates.
- ◆ **Drink Water.** Even mild dehydration can alter a person’s mood, energy level, and ability to think clearly. You have heard it before, and for good reason, drink at least eight, 8 ounce glasses of water a day.
- ◆ **Nourish Your Body.** We all know how we are *supposed* to eat but it’s hard when you are eating on the go, not eating regularly, or just looking for a quick pick me up to boost your mood. It’s very important to plan your meals and snacks ahead of time (when you aren’t tired or hungry) and keep healthy choices handy so you can keep your blood sugar – and mood – stable.
- ◆ **Sleep.** This one can be tough when there aren’t enough hours in the day to get everything done, or the person you care for gets up frequently at night. However, getting those 6 to 8 hours of shut eye is important because sleep deprivation can cause problems such as irritability, difficulty concentrating, poor memory, and impaired driving ability. Try to wind down at night and create a ritual that your mind and body identify with bedtime. A warm shower, writing in a journal, reading, meditating, taking deep breaths—whatever will help you shut down your over-worked mind and relax.
- ◆ **Move Your Body.** Just about any exercise can be of benefit to your physical, emotional, and mental health if you do it on a regular basis. There are many options such as walking, dancing, stretching, lifting hand weights, swimming, taking Martial Arts classes, using exercise DVD’s, and others. Just find something that you enjoy and commit to doing it at least three times per week. It can improve your mood, cognitive abilities, energy level, and overall health.

Okay, those are all crucial and life-sustaining suggestions. One of equal importance is to **Take a Break**. It’s important to get time away from the person you are caring for. Even if you don’t live with your care recipient, you need time to spend on your own interests without worrying about getting “the call” saying your attention is needed because no one else can help. Line up a family member, neighbor, friend, paid caregiver, respite stay at a facility, adult daycare—whatever it takes to get some time off.

## Additional Suggestions:

- ◆ **Set Boundaries** – Decide what you will and won't do for your care recipient and what behavior you will and won't accept from them. Make it as clear to them as you can and stick with what you say. When you behave in new, self-affirming ways instead of repeating old patterns, you may see a difference in the way the other person responds.
- ◆ **Laugh** – As often as you can. We all have “sitcom moments” in our lives when things are just so ridiculously awful they are funny. Read a book from the humor section of a bookstore, watch a funny TV show or DVD, look-up a website filled with jokes and silly pictures – just do something that will make you smile.
- ◆ **Write in a Journal** – Sometimes getting your thoughts down on paper can be cathartic. It can be a safe way to express the feelings churning inside of you. Writing a letter to someone that you never intend to give them can be another way to release some emotions that are troubling you.
- ◆ **Meditate and/or Visualize** – It doesn't have to be anything fancy to be helpful. Focus on your breath while thinking a word or phrase that makes you feel calm and relaxed. You can also picture a beautiful place and see yourself there. Create a scene so real that you can feel the breeze blowing, smell the flowers, and hear the sounds of the brook – whatever works with your image.
- ◆ **Give Yourself Some Credit** – You are helping another person in a meaningful way – that's a truly generous gift. It's true your care recipient may not always be appreciative. They may refuse your advice or take out their frustrations on you. At those times it might help to focus on why you have chosen to be a caregiver and what about it you find rewarding or important. And be compassionate towards yourself. Some days you may be on top of things and get a lot accomplished, and other days you may feel worn out and just want to hide. What's important to remember is that *none of us are perfect and that's okay*. You are still performing a great service to another human being and you deserve applause, not self-recriminations.

**Above and beyond all else, *take good care of yourself!***