

Taking Care of Yourself as You Care for Others

Providing care to people who need caregiving assistance is many times a calling for those who are professional caregivers. Caregivers provide help to those who need assistance with everyday tasks that are vital to daily living, as well as social and emotional support. Caregiving has both a physical and mental component that requires knowledge, skills, and abilities. Caregiving can be rewarding and stressful. It is important for a caregiver to take care of themselves to have the physical and emotional energy required to provide care while maintaining their own health and wellbeing. The role of the In-home aide can be demanding. It is important that In-home aides remain healthy to continue to provide care to individuals in their homes. Working as an In-home aide is hard work; therefore, this month's newsletter is dedicated to taking care of you! Taking care of yourself as you take care of others is an important part of your overall wellbeing.

In-Home Aides Partners in Quality Care is a monthly newsletter.

Kathie Smith, BSN, RN, VP of Home Care and State Relations, AHHC of NC, Author; © Copyright AHHC 2023 May be reproduced for In-Home Aides

Objectives:

- Self-Care Strategies
- Stress Management Strategies

References:

<https://www.cdc.gov/populationhealth/well-being/features/reduce-stress.htm>

<https://info.ncdhhs.gov/dhsr/hcpr/curriculum/homecareaidecurriculum.html>

<https://www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management/ss/slideshow-self-care-tips>

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/caring-for-your-mental-health>

Taking Care of Yourself as You Care for Others

Being in a care giving profession such as an In-home aide can have many sources of stress. Dealing with ill, and at times dying clients can be a challenge. Likewise, demands on the In-home aide's body, mind, and emotions can be quite overwhelming. Some In-home aides also experience anxiety over a lack of control over their client's care. Often the client is not receiving all the care they need, adding burden to those who are trying to provide care. Caring for someone else can be physically challenging. Bathing, lifting, moving the client, etc., can be exhausting, as well as dangerous if you are distracted or careless. Being an In-home aide demands focus and attention, which can be draining to exert so much mental energy into clients or tasks, day in and day out. Taking care of ourselves is one of the responsibilities we have. We owe it to ourselves, our families, and our employer to love ourselves, and then we are more likely to take care of ourselves. Working is stressful and can take its toll. We can manage it if we take the time to live a healthy lifestyle. If you have a stressful situation related to working with your client or other aspects of work, reach out to your agency supervisor to discuss the situation and work on solutions. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Emotional Well Being/Population Health- 32% of US adults reported anxiety or depression symptoms.

Connect with Others to Reduce Stress

Having meaningful relationships can create a sense of belonging. A feeling of being cared for, valued, and supported can help us become more resilient. This is called social connectedness. Connecting with others can help us cope with stress and become more resilient. Here are some ways to reduce stress by connecting with others:

- Reach out to your community, family members, or friends. Talk with someone you trust about your feelings or any concerns.
 - Make time for cultural, spiritual, or religious activities.
 - Volunteer with organizations that interest you. Giving back to others can help you too.
 - Get outside with others, connect with nature, and explore green spaces.
- People who tend to their spiritual side are less apt to worry and feel sad. For some, that means prayer and worship services. For others, it has nothing to do with religion. You may simply meditate every morning. Either way, the result can be that you're better able to take on stress.

Stress management is a component of taking care of yourself. Stress is the body's reaction to any change that requires an adjustment or response. The body reacts to these changes with physical, mental, and emotional responses. Stress is a normal part of life. You can experience stress from your environment, your body, and your thoughts. Even positive life changes such as a promotion, a mortgage, or the birth of a child produce stress.

Ideas for Stress Reduction

- Eat a balanced diet and fuel your mind and body with nutritious foods.
- Get plenty of rest/sleep each night. Not once a week or on the weekends, but every night.
- Exercise regularly. Start a walking group at lunch time or walk for 30 minutes before you go home each night.
- Accept your own limits; do not try to do it all.
- Recognize when you need help and ask for assistance when you need it.
- Make a realistic schedule for yourself and your tasks.
- Make lists. Tasks seem less daunting when they are laid out in front of you. Also, as you cross items off your list, it gives you a feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction.
- Relax. Breathe, meditate, sit quietly, etc., and consciously try to stop what you are doing and relax.
- Take a break. Take some time to yourself. This is ok; do not feel guilty about doing something for yourself.
- Spend time with a pet. Animals can be therapeutic for stress and anxiety. Feed birds or fish.
- See your doctor for regular medical check-ups.
- Cut yourself some slack. Do not be harder on yourself than you would be to someone else.
- Love yourself. Tell yourself how proud you are of YOU every day. Give yourself credit for even the smallest accomplishments.
- Listen to yourself and identify your feelings, do not bury them, or ignore them.
- Get a massage, pedicure, manicure, etc. – something for YOU.
- Talk to people who can validate you and your feelings. Not everyone will understand your stress, therefore join a support group, or talk to co-workers. Express your needs verbally. Others may not pick up on subtle or physical cues. Be direct, honest, and clear.
- Give yourself permission to cry.
- Read a magazine or go to a movie.
- Do not work through your lunch or breaks.
- Laugh every day.
- Allow yourself to get professional help if your support system is not enough.
- Listen to music.
- Reduce your daily caffeine intake.
- Clean your car, office space, desk, etc. Less clutter in your environment may help clear clutter from your mind. Clutter makes us less happy about where we live, as well as how we feel about ourselves.
- Try not to blame others for your own anxieties, unhappiness, or poor health.
- Stay involved with hobbies or try a new hobby.
- Keep a journal. Put your thoughts and feelings on paper, and you may find them easier to deal with.
- Plant flowers or vegetables. Being outdoors can help you feel more calm and balanced.
- Create a support team or group with co-workers, family, neighbors, etc. Seek help when you need it from a professional.
- **For other ideas for healthy practices for your mind, body, surroundings, and relationships**, see the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Wellness Toolkits at this link- <https://www.nih.gov/health-information/your-healthiest-self-wellness-toolkits>
- If possible, in your job, rotate responsibilities with others.
- Clarify personal boundaries and stick to them. It is ok to say no to someone; you need to take care of you first.

Try a few of these stress reduction ideas this week! Reflect on the results. Try others as needed until you find what works for you!

Self-care means taking the time to do things that help you live well and improve both your physical health and mental health. When it comes to your mental health, self-care can help you manage stress, lower your risk of illness, and increase your energy. Even small acts of self-care in your daily life can have a big impact. Here are some tips to help you get started with self-care:

- Get regular exercise. Just 30 minutes of walking every day can help boost your mood and improve your health. Small amounts of exercise add up, so don't be discouraged if you can't do 30 minutes at one time.
- Eat healthy, regular meals and stay hydrated. A balanced diet and plenty of water can improve your energy and focus throughout the day. Also, limit caffeinated beverages such as soft drinks or coffee.
- Make sleep a priority. Stick to a schedule, and make sure you're getting enough sleep. Blue light from devices and screens can make it harder to fall asleep, so reduce blue light exposure from your phone or computer before bedtime.
- Try a relaxing activity. Explore relaxation or wellness programs or apps, which may incorporate meditation, muscle relaxation, or breathing exercises. Schedule regular times for these and other healthy activities you enjoy such as journaling.
- Set goals and priorities. Decide what must get done now and what can wait. Learn to say "no" to new tasks if you start to feel like you're taking on too much. Try to be mindful of what you have accomplished at the end of the day, not what you have been unable to do.
- Practice gratitude. Remind yourself daily of things you are grateful for. Be specific. Write them down at night or replay them in your mind. Focus on positivity. Identify and challenge your negative and unhelpful thoughts. Stay connected. Reach out to your friends or family members who can provide emotional support and practical help.
- **Self-care looks different for everyone, and it is important to find what you need and enjoy.** It may take trial and error to discover what works best for you. In addition, although self-care is not a cure for mental illnesses, understanding what causes or triggers your mild symptoms and what coping techniques work for you can help manage your mental health.



“Rest and self-care are so important. When you take time to replenish your spirit, it allows you to serve from the overflow. You cannot serve from an empty vessel.”

Eleanor Brown, author

Relaxation Exercise-Deep Breathing

- Sit up in chair utilizing good posture.
- Get as relaxed as possible. Close your eyes. Assess your body for tension.
- Take a slow deep breath, through your nose. As you inhale or breathe in, the abdomen should rise.
- Exhale (release the breath) slowly through your mouth.
- Continue for 3-5 minutes

Visualization

In this relaxation technique, you form mental images to take a visual journey to a peaceful, calming place or situation. During visualization, try to use as many senses as you can, including smell, sight, sound, and touch. If you imagine relaxing at the ocean, for instance, think about the smell of salt water, the sound of crashing waves and the warmth of the sun on your body. You may want to close your eyes, sit in a quiet spot and loosen any tight clothing.