

Caring for Yourself While Caring for Others

Every day, more than 4 million family caregivers in the U.S. provide care for adults with chronic illnesses or other needs for assistance. Their efforts sustain families, strengthen communities, and make independent living possible for millions of older adults and individuals with disabilities. Yet, the demands of caregiving often come with personal emotional, physical, and financial costs.

The Toll of Caregiving

Caregiving is often an act of love and service, but it can also take a toll. You may find that:

- You focus so much on others that you forget to care for yourself.
- You feel emotionally or physically drained, even when you want to stay strong for your loved one.
- Stress and sadness build over time. Studies show caregivers experience higher levels of depression and stress than non-caregivers.
- Women caregivers are particularly at risk for increased stress, anxiety, exhaustion, depression, reduced immune response and poor physical health.¹



Recognizing these challenges is the first step toward protecting your own wellbeing and preventing burnout.

What Caregivers Are Saying

In May 2024, the Kaiser Family Foundation conducted caregiver focus groups with unpaid family caregivers and direct care workers showed that caregivers:

- Often started caregiving because they were the only person available to help.
- Reported that their caregiving role is physically and mentally demanding and there are limited resources to help deal with mental and emotional challenges of caregiving.
- Find it difficult to balance paid work and family caregiving responsibilities with caring for their children or other family members, professional commitments, time with friend, and self-care.
- Said they struggle to make ends meet, especially when they had to cut back other work to do the caregiving work.

Millions of caregivers share similar experiences and help is available.

Strategies for Self-Care

Taking care of yourself is not selfish: it's essential. Taking time to care for yourself also ensures you are best able to help your loved one. Key strategies for caregivers to prevent burnout include:

- Asking for help when you need it.
- Seeking emotional support (like caregiver support groups).
- Learn and use stress-reduction techniques like meditation or journaling
- Attend to your own healthcare needs (both physical and mental).
- Get sufficient rest, nutrition and physical activity.
- Take time off (without feeling guilty) for pleasant, social, or nurturing activities.
- Accept support. It's a sign of strength not weakness.
- Seek professional counseling if you need it.



Self-Identification as a Caregiver Matters

The Caregiver Action Network emphasizes the importance of self-identifying as a caregiver to ensure that both you and your loved one get appropriate support.

- **At work:** Talk to your employer. You may be eligible for flexible work hours or time off under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).
- **With healthcare and insurance providers:** Sharing your role helps you provide valuable insights and advocate more effectively.
- **With friends or faith communities:** Sharing your role can help strengthen your support network.



Resources for Caregivers

Family Caregiver Alliance

The [Family Caregiver Alliance](#) provides information, support, and resources with the aim of improving the quality of the life for family caregivers and the people who receive their care. (Available in Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Tagalog.)

Caregiver Action Network

The [Caregiver Action Network](#) offers a Peer Forum, a Story Sharing platform, the [Family Caregiver Toolbox](#), and more. The Network has an online resource for [BIPOC caregivers](#) that includes a range of resources specifically designed to address the unique cultural contexts faced by BIPOC families.



Eldercare Locator

The [Eldercare Locator](#) is a service of the U.S. Administration on Aging that connects users to state and local resources.

NAMI Family-to-Family Program

The [NAMI Family-to-Family Education Program](#) is a free educational program for family and friends of people with mental health conditions. [Locate a class.](#)

If you or someone you know is experiencing a crisis hotlines are available for 24/7 confidential support.

National Crisis Line – Call or text **988** or visit [988lifeline.org](#)

This resource was written and reviewed by Vedrana Hodzic, M. D.

Find more resources at [mentalhealthcareworks.org](#)