



The High Calling of Caregiving:

*How to nurture a loved one's
well-being while supporting
your needs as a caregiver*

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Transforming the Aging Experience

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Introduction: A High Calling and a Paradox

Faithful caregivers are oft-reminded to make self-care a priority. Frequently, the analogy of flight attendants instructing adult passengers to put on their own oxygen masks first before assisting others is used to illustrate the importance of self-care when providing care for another. However, this advice can often fall short of equipping caregivers with the tools they require to meaningfully meet needs and nurture the well-being of their loved one. When the components of well-being are identified and explained, they can provide deeper meaning to the high calling of caregiving and result in a more satisfying approach that nurtures well-being. Interestingly, when one embraces the idea that caring for one's emotional and spiritual well-being are just as important as caring for their physical well-being, the caregiver is likely to discover renewed purpose and a greater sense of hope. Simply put, when one understands and emulates the well-being philosophy, the well-being of the loved one (as well as the caregiver) improves.

The Well-being Philosophy

Believes:

- Every person has unique stories, experiences and perspectives that should be embraced and honored.
- Individuals have the right to experience a life of choice, flexibility and control that reflect their needs, preferences and values.

Involves:

- Cultivating uniquely special and genuine relationships built upon unconditional love, optimism and respect.
- Creating opportunities to experience meaning, purpose and growth every day.
- Knowing if someone you are caring for is living with cognitive or physical challenges, a life of meaning and purpose continues to be possible in the right environment.

Seven Components of Well-Being *(adopted from Dr. Allen Power's Domains of Well-Being):*

- **Identity:** Celebrating one's unique identity
- **Connectedness:** Being with someone, offering sense of belonging
- **Security:** Finding balance – providing safety while offering privacy, dignity and respect
- **Autonomy:** Allowing the freedom to make choices
- **Meaning:** Creating experiences that provide a sense of contributing, making a difference, and purpose
- **Growth:** Finding opportunities to learn, grow and develop
- **Joy:** Having fun and practicing gratitude



How to Support Your Own Well-being

20 Tips That Promote Well-being

Though not a comprehensive list, caregivers from the Medicare Alzheimer's Project in Broward and Miami-Dade Counties in Florida compiled 20 of their best tips and ideas to promote personal well-being while caring for a loved one.

1. Laugh about something every day.
2. Take care of yourself physically.
3. Eat a well-balanced diet.
4. Talk with someone every day.
5. Let family and friends help. Give them printed material on memory disorders so they can better understand your relative.
6. Give yourself permission to have a good cry. Tears aren't a weakness; they reduce tension.
7. Exercise (a brisk walk counts).
8. Get adequate rest.
9. Try a bowl of Cheerios and milk before bed to promote sleep.
10. Avoid noisy and/or tension-filled movies at night. Even the late news can add to stress.
11. Reduce daily caffeine intake.
12. Get professional help if you feel your support system isn't adequate or if you feel overwhelmed.
13. Take a break every day, even if it's only 10 minutes alone in the backyard.
14. Explore community resources and connect yourself with them.
15. Listen to music.
16. Learn relaxation techniques.
17. Regularly attend one or more support groups and education workshops.
18. Give yourself a treat at least once a month: an ice cream cone, a new shirt or dress, a night out with friends, or a flowering plant are just a few ideas.
19. Read the [Fearless Caregiver Manifesto](#).
20. Know your limitations.

For additional caregiving support articles and resources, visit [Today's Caregiver Magazine](#).



The Perils of Caregiver Fatigue

More than one in 10 family caregivers report that caregiving had caused their own physical health to deteriorate, with many mentioning that they've neglected their own health appointments because of their caregiving duties. The National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP states that family caregivers spend an average of 24.4 hours per week providing care. However, if you're caring for someone experiencing cognitive and physical changes who requires more direct attention and supervision, it's likely you're spending even more hours providing care. Maybe your entire day is spent caring for your loved one. Understandably, this can be exhausting physically, as well as mentally and emotionally.

If you're working extremely hard, with little help or relief or a way to manage your stress, it's likely that you'll experience caregiver fatigue. Fatigue is a state of emotional, physical and emotional exhaustion caused by prolonged stress. According to the Cleveland Clinic, fatigue can be accompanied by a change in attitude; from positive and caring to negative and overwhelmed. This is a common response to feeling unable to meet constant demands.

Moreover, caregiver fatigue can lead to compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue is accompanied by feeling hopeless, pessimistic, disinterested and eventually, indifferent. It is characterized by emotional and physical exhaustion leading to a diminished ability to empathize or feel compassion for others. And it happens most often to caregivers who unable to regroup and gain a sense of relief. Therefore, recognizing caregiver fatigue, seeking opportunities for support and creating environments that nurture well-being are all essential to sustaining the quality of care you are able to provide your loved one.

Recognizing Caregiver Fatigue

Here are a few signs that you are experiencing caregiver fatigue and are in need of added support and renewed perspective:

- **Lack of sleep or changes in sleep patterns** - Not getting enough sleep can affect your mood, memory and health in really surprising ways. It can also lead to depression, weight gain, heart disease and premature death.
- **Health problems** - A lack of attention to your own needs can lead to negative changes in your health – maybe you've been missing regular checkups or other important health screenings. Remember, mental health and physical health are closely linked. Depression can cause real physical ailments such as back pain and digestive issues.
- **Financial strain** - According to the AARP, caregivers spend on average 20% of their income on caregiving expenses. This includes home modifications, medications, insurance premiums, additional food, personal supplies and more.
- **Anger** - Feeling frustrated and angry is common. In fact, it is actually normal to feel angry because of feeling angry and frustrated! Caregiving is difficult and requires you to feel a host of human emotions. It is important to not feel stuck in guilt. Rather, accept that you are bearing a load that has revealed your inner strength and character.
- **Isolation** - Sometimes caregiving can impact socializing with friends, hobbies and relaxing. Whether it's practicing yoga, going for a run, getting dinner or drinks with a friend, crafting or even just taking a drive by yourself, finding time to nurture your well-being is very important.





If you're feeling any of these things, you must work quickly to prevent further duress. In general, burnout can occur due to a lack of resources and social support. If you're experiencing burnout, it may be time to seek outside resources to help lighten your load. Here are a few suggestions:

Caregiver Support Groups

Connecting with others is an important part of caring for ourselves. Support groups bring people together who are going through (or *have* gone through) similar experiences. If you are dealing with a major illness or a stressful life transition, you do not have to go through it alone—a support group can help.

Support groups can:

- Provide you with a safe, confidential and supportive environment to share your lived experience (even the frustrations and challenges).
- Help build your capacity and resiliency to navigate your situation. Learn from others who have developed meaningful approaches and strategies for living with a diagnosis of dementia or how to support a loved one with a diagnosis.
- Create connections between you and others in similar situations. Learn about the wide array of resources and support available to you and your loved one.

To find a group near you, we encourage you to first reach out to your local memory care provider, such as [Eskaton](#). We offer online and in-person peer support groups for caregivers just like you. You can also use these resources:

Caregiver Support Groups

- [National Alliance for Caregiving](#)
- [Alzheimer's Association](#)
- [AARP Caregiving Resource Center](#)
- [Eskaton Support Groups for Caregivers](#)
- [Eskaton Support Groups](#)

In-Home Care: Non-medical and Medical

Many in-home care providers use the term home care or home healthcare to describe the services they offer, but there are considerable distinctions between the two models. Knowing the difference can help you select the level of care and agency best suited to meet your needs.

Non-medical Home Care

This type of care is not prescribed by a doctor and is usually paid for by the client, their family, or a long-term care insurance policy or benefit.

What care can be provided?

- Help with bathing, dressing, mobility and using the bathroom
- Companionship
- Light housekeeping
- Daily tasks
- Transportation

Home Healthcare

Home healthcare — frequently referred to simply as “home health” — is skilled care delivered directly to a patient’s home. Home health services are prescribed by a doctor and usually paid for by Medicare. Home health is typically prescribed or recommended by a physician after a stay at the hospital and/or skilled nursing community. It is medical care provided by a nurse or home health aide, and is usually provided during a visit to your home for the purpose of treating or managing an illness, injury, or medical condition.

What are skilled home health services?

- Wound care for pressure sores or a surgical wound
- Patient and caregiver education
- Intravenous or nutrition therapy
- Injections
- Monitoring serious illness and unstable health status

In general, the goal of skilled home health services is to treat an illness or injury. Home health helps with the following:

- Recovering from an injury or illness
- Regaining independence
- Maintaining current health condition or level of function

To learn more about non-medical and medical home care, please review the eBook [*Non-Medical Home Care vs. Home Healthcare.*](#)



Short-term Stays, Respite Care and Day Programs

Short-term Stays

Taking advantage of respite care may be incredibly helpful. Everyone needs a little time to refresh now and then. Many residential living communities, including [Eskaton Communities](#), offer short term stays in all levels of residence, which benefit both families and guests. Short term residents are able to take part in all the community social activities and dining options while knowing extra care is available should they need it. At the same time, caregivers get the break they need to be reinvigorated so they can take over when their loved ones are ready to return home.

Respite Care at Home

As a caregiver of an older adult, it is important to remember that if you do not take time to practice self-care, you cannot continue to be effective in your role. Non-medical home care agencies, including [Live Well at Home by Eskaton](#), offer respite care services that allow family caregivers to “take a break.” Whether taking a half-day to go to a movie, a weekend away, or an extended vacation, home respite care can provide daily, weekly, or as-needed senior care while you are away.

In Northern California, The [Del Oro Caregiver Resource Center](#) provides the family caregiver assistance and support through a comprehensive package of [services](#) designed to enable families to keep their loved ones at home for as long as possible.





Day Stays

Many memory care communities and adult day health centers also offer day stays. Day stays are typically full-day or half-day. Participants are able to take advantage of services in a safe and secure environment with staff who are specifically trained to care for those living with cognitive and physical change. In addition, they'll benefit from home-cooked meals, life-enriching activities, the opportunity to socialize with others, group outings and more. Many programs offer all this for one daily price, although add-on costs for transportation or specialized care needs may be applicable.

In addition to a break for the caregiver, another benefit of short-term stays and day stays at a community is getting the opportunity to experience the lifestyle and services before having to make a long-term decision. For example, if a move to memory care is something you are starting to consider, this may be a good way to experience the care and programs before making a final decision. You can evaluate the staff, services and amenities provided on a trial basis. You can also see how your loved one reacts to their stay – did they come home happy? That's a good sign that the community may be a good choice for the future.



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