

A SELF-CARE GUIDE FOR
PROFESSIONAL
Caregivers



This Guide is designed for professional and paraprofessional staff who support people with memory challenges. A similar Guide is available for family members. A companion Self-Care Guide is also available for the person being supported.

This resource is based on an earlier program on Self-Care for caregivers supporting family members with disabilities.

Comprehensive Services on Aging (COPSA) has been providing compassionate and sensitive mental health care to the elderly and their caregivers since its inception in 1975. At the Memory Disorders Clinic, a team of dementia specialists diagnoses and treats people with memory disorders and the behavioral problems that often accompany them. COPSA offers training to doctors, nurses, social workers and other health-care professionals who work with older adults, as well as to caregivers and community members.

Care2Caregivers provides peer counseling, education, support and referrals through a toll-free help line. Trained professionals, who have also been family caregivers, are available to support caregivers at **800-424-2494**.

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This guide was developed in 2019 through a collaboration by Mary Catherine Lundquist, Margaret Swarbrick, Susan Gould Fogerite, Patricia Nemec, and Edna Pilch through [Comprehensive Services on Aging, Rutgers Health University Behavioral Health Care](#).



Caregiving

A caregiver is someone who supports the health needs of another person, either as a paid provider or as a family member or friend. This Guide was developed for caregivers whose job involves supporting people with memory loss.

The conditions that cause memory loss bring many special challenges. Whether you provide care as part of your job or you do it as part of your personal life, you also need to care for yourself. You need energy and focused attention to cope with the many tasks, stressors, and challenges that you face.

This Guide will help you attend to your own health and well-being. Using this Guide, you will explore what you already do now, including your daily routines, habits, and activities. You will think about what else you can do or can learn to do, which may include identifying the supports you need to improve your self-care and life balance. This Guide reviews simple practices for taking care of yourself, which will increase your ability to provide support, boost your quality of life and safety, and improve your own wellness.

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Caregivers often do a wonderful job providing care and support by filling in for what the person can no longer do independently. Many people with memory loss need help all day, every day. With other people depending on you for care, it can be hard to remember to care for yourself, especially if you are caring for more than one person during your shift.

By the time someone needs your professional care, they have lost many abilities. It can be hard to imagine how they were in their younger days. They may have trouble communicating, they may behave in difficult ways, and their family may be unable to care for them any longer. They may be frightened or suspicious of you, and it can be hard to get them to trust you, especially if they can't remember you from day to day.

Being a caregiver requires knowledge, skill, and patience. To be at your best on the job, you need to be sure that you take care of yourself. Self-care gives you the energy, strength, and positive attitude you need to do what you do every day.

"I like having a job where I help people, even if they don't always appreciate what I do. Sometimes, it's sad. In my job, the people I help don't get better. Some are all alone. I have days when all that sadness gets me down."

Your work as a caregiver doesn't happen in a vacuum. You have a life outside of your work. You have other commitments, such as your own family, health, friends, and other responsibilities to manage. You may even be providing care for your own children or a family member with memory loss. It can be hard to find the time and the energy to look after everything and everyone.

As a person's condition worsens, their symptoms may become more challenging. As they can do less for themselves, they will need more help from you. This makes it extra important for you, as a caregiver, to check in with yourself regularly and take care of your own needs.

Self-Care

We focus on self-care in this Guide because you are important! Self-care is a set of planned and deliberate actions—things that you do daily or weekly to manage your stress and feel balanced. In this Guide, we have included activities that you can do often during your daily routines and habits. Strengthening your self-care skills, habits, and routines will help you get well, feel well, and stay well.



Well-being includes a positive sense of self and being healthy physically, emotionally, and socially. Your health habits, the things you do and the choices you make every day, can help you improve your sense of well-being. Some health habits that can enhance your well-being include: sleep and rest, active involvement in productive activity, nourishing yourself with good food and thoughts, moving more, moving with awareness, and making positive connections with people you support at work, and others you care about.

While there is a lot you can do on your own, self-care also requires support from others. To help lighten your load, reach out to other people in your life, both on the job and outside of work.

It's never too early and never too late to pay attention to your self-care. You can start wherever you are, with whatever you can do. You may become attached to some people you are supporting and to their families. You may feel sad that they're struggling and it will likely get worse over time. Even with this tough part of your job, it is still possible for you to maintain a sense of well-being as you support others through their illness.

How do I find the time for self-care?

Some self-care can be done in small bits of time even while you are having a busy day at work. Just one minute can make a difference. As you go through each day, look for times that you can do something for yourself. You will find lots of ideas here. This Guide may even remind you of things you did in the past that can help you now.

This Guide provides you with a simple process for self-care. We encourage you to try the activities included here. Check out the tips and use the pieces that work best for you.

Our breathing is always there. No matter what our thoughts, emotions, and perceptions may be, our breathing stays with us like a faithful friend.

You may find yourself feeling burdened, bogged down in difficult emotions, or scattered by your many responsibilities. At these times, you can pay attention to your breathing. This

will help you to collect your thoughts and anchor your mind.

If you take time for self-care, by taking small “pause” breaks, eating well, moving more, and improving your sleep, you will feel less stressed. When you pay attention to your own physical and emotional needs, you feel better and you are better able to support others.

“Try pausing right before and right after undertaking a new action, even something simple like putting a key in a lock to open a door. Such pauses take a brief moment, yet they have the effect of decompressing time and centering you.”

— David Steindl-Rast

check-in
breathe

Pause

Taking breaks during the day, even a few seconds at a time, is the first step in self-care. We call this **Pause**.

Pausing means being fully aware of the present moment, without judging what should or should not be happening. As a caregiver, you may find yourself in the middle of a situation that you don't like but can't change. You may feel trapped and angry.

Even in the midst of difficult feelings, like anger about that situation, you can choose, on purpose, to pause and pay attention to the present moment, with a loving awareness. Pausing, and being aware of the situation and your response to it, can help break the cycle of frustration and anger.

This may sound difficult and be challenging at first, but with practice, it becomes easier and more natural. Over time, practicing Pause can help you spend less time feeling annoyed. You may find you are more loving and forgiving of yourself. The moment of pause lets you choose responses that make you feel more comfortable and, as an added benefit, the person you are supporting may stay calmer.

When we stop and observe our interactions with others, and when we stop and observe our interactions with ourselves, it gives us space to be non-judgmental. A brief pause helps you accept the person you are supporting for who they are, and where they are, in their life journey.

To pause, you simply **stop**.

Stop what you are doing.

Stop what you are thinking.

Stop before you react to the situation.

Check in with how you are feeling in your body. **Concentrate** on your senses. **Notice what you see, hear, smell, taste, or touch.**

Feel your feelings. Are you angry? Frustrated? Sad? Do you feel guilty or helpless? You don't have to do anything with those feelings—just say “hello” to them and allow them to be.

A pause can help you learn that your mind sometimes tells you stories about not doing enough, about a difficult future, or about wishing for a different past. Of course, you do benefit from planning for the future and you can learn from the past. However, you also benefit from spending mental time in the present, where your life is actually happening. Learn the difference between the direct here-and-now that you're feeling through your senses of touch, taste, sight, sound, and smell, and the stories you tell yourself about what's going on.

Self-care includes a regular practice of pausing and being aware in the moment. This practice will help you gradually become more aware of a space where you can choose how to focus your attention, leading to less distress and a greater sense of ease and well-being right now.

Many paid caregivers who pause and take time to be more aware say that it improves their relationships with the people they support and with their co-workers. When a caregiver is calm and less reactive to repetitive or disruptive behaviors, the person they are supporting also tends to be calmer. Both have more positive day-to-day experiences. This makes everything easier.

The next time you find yourself getting angry or upset with others, try a pause and notice how you feel. Notice how different it is to provide support when you take time to be really aware of this moment. What happens?

Self-Care Activity: *Pause & Breathe*

This activity takes 1 to 3 minutes. There are three steps to the activity:

1 *Check in*

Sit quietly. Stay upright and awake through the practice. Relax. If you'd like, you can try closing your eyes.

Become aware of the feelings in your body.

- What do you feel? Notice what it's like to sit. Pay attention to how your clothes feel on your skin. Feel your muscles and joints from the inside of your body.
- You don't need to change anything, just become aware.

2 *Focus on the Breath*

Now, become aware of your breathing.

- Notice the sensations of your breath coming in and going out. You don't need to change your breath at all. Just be aware of breathing.
- Make your breath the focus of your attention.
- Your mind may wander. That's fine. When you notice you are thinking or worrying, just shift your focus back to your breathing.
- Some people like to say something to themselves as they breathe in or breathe out, like "calm" or "peace" or "Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know that I am breathing out."

3 *Proceed (with awareness)*

Before you end your short pause, refocus on how your body feels.

- Notice your body as a whole.
- Have any sensations changed?
- Don't worry about what you're thinking or if you're doing this correctly.
- Thank yourself for making time to pause.

As you move back into your daily activities, take some of your fresh awareness and your appreciation with you.

Self-Care Tips: **Pause**

You can do a formal practice at specific times during the day. Many people find that early morning and right before going to bed are good times for a pause practice. If you're at work, try adding a pause during lunch or a coffee break.

Try to build Pause into your daily routines, habits, and activities. You can add informal practices by focusing on body sensations, breath, and awareness as you walk, eat, or do your everyday activities or chores.

- Pause and notice the sounds around you.
- Notice the feel of the sheets as you make a bed or the feel of the spoon as you are helping someone with a meal.
- Take a moment to really see the raindrops on the windowpane, the sunlight coming through the window, or the bright moonlight in the middle of the night.

Remember how important it is to pause during a stressful situation.

- Pause as you wait for the person you're supporting to complete a task that seems to be taking forever.
- Be aware of the sensations in your body when the person is asking the same question for what feels like the 50th time in the last 10 minutes.
- Notice how the seat of the car feels when you are sitting in a traffic jam.
- Pay attention to your breathing for a few moments before cleaning up a big mess or doing a difficult task.

Find ways that you can make these practices a part of your caregiving, and your other daily activities, without taking any extra time to do it.

With repeated practice, you will be more aware of, and comfortable with, your feelings and the sensations in your body. You will learn to be gentler with yourself. **A moment's pause can give you a whole new outlook on life.**

Remember: *It's all about returning your attention again and again to the present. Be aware of the moment. Don't judge your feelings. Be kind to yourself.*

Breathe

When you pause, you focus on your breath, but you don't change it. Now, we are adding a different kind of attention to your breath. This new practice will help you relax, so you feel calmer and less stressed.

Have you noticed that when you are calm and peaceful, you breathe differently from when you are nervous or afraid?

The breath responds to the mind. The amazing thing, which you may not know, is that the mind also responds to the breath! You can change the state of your mind and body by controlling your breathing.

You may have heard of the "flight or fight" response. When you are frightened or stressed, your body wants to escape or attack the source of the problem. Your body's energy changes. This can be helpful in an emergency. However, when this happens over and over every day, your body can wear down. You get tense. You feel tired. You may be short-tempered. You may catch a cold or worsen another health problem.

Your body also has a relaxation response, sometimes called "rest and digest." At these times, your body and mind are calm. The world feels like a safe place and you feel content.

By learning to control your breath, you can influence your feelings and affect your body. Adjusting your breathing in certain ways when you pause helps you feel calm. Once you feel calmer, you can re-focus. This becomes especially important in difficult situations, such as when you are surrounded by disorder and chaos.

To relax, we can change our breathing so that our upper belly and lower ribs come outward as we breathe in, and they go inward as we breathe out. This happens when we use a large breathing muscle in the middle of our body to move air in and out of our lungs. This is different from breathing mainly into our upper chest, which tends to make us feel more anxious.

Self-Care Activity: **Breathing**

Controlling your breathing is a good self-care practice.

This activity will help you breathe so your upper belly and lower ribs come outward as you breathe in, and go inward as you breathe out. This is the way you were born breathing and it's the best way to breathe as you go through your day.

During this breathing practice, you will take deep, full, slow breaths, so you can relax into the "rest and digest" mode. Breathing in this way can help balance your nervous system, calm your mind, and help boost the oxygen in your blood.

To do this activity, sit up straight in a comfortable chair. It's best to sit on a firm surface, not on a very soft chair or couch.

Once you learn this breathing practice, you can try it on your own in other positions; lying down on your back, lying down on your front, sitting on the floor, or standing. The important thing is to take a few minutes to pause and breathe. Make it a habit. Over time, you will learn what works best for you.

"Breathing is your seatbelt in everyday life. It keeps you safe here in the present moment. If you know how to breathe, how to sit calmly and quietly, then you have your seatbelt and you're always safe."

– Thich Nhat Hanh

Breathing While Sitting

Sit up straight with both feet on the floor.

- Place your right hand on your upper belly, just above your belly button, with your thumb at your breastbone.
- Place your left hand on your upper chest.

Breathe slowly and deeply through your nose. Breathe in. Breathe out.

- Notice that your upper belly comes out when you breathe in and goes in when you breathe out. Your upper hand on your chest stays still.
- Lengthen your exhale. Let your breath out more slowly and more completely. Don't force it. Be sure you are still comfortable and relaxed.
- Count the time it takes you to breathe in. Count the time to breathe out.
 - When "in" and "out" times are equal, this is one-to-one breathing.
 - Once you feel comfortable with one-to-one breathing, try slowing down when you breathe out. You can let your exhale be up to twice as long as your inhale. This is called two-to-one breath.
 - Counting your breath occupies your mind. By counting and making your out-breath longer and more complete, you are able to calm your body and mind.

Breathe without a break or pause.

- Reduce, and gradually let go of, any pause at the end of the inhale or the exhale. Let every inhale flow into the exhale. Let every exhale flow into the inhale. There should be no pause or break. Let the breath flow. If you need to pause between breaths, see if you can shorten the pause.

Smooth the breath.

- If your mind is agitated, your breath is uneven or jerky. Imagine your breath as a flowing stream. Smoothing it out will help calm your mind.

Quiet the breath.

- Gradually make your breath as silent as you can at this time.

After you understand how to breathe like this, you can let your hands rest on your thighs with your palms facing down. Continue to breathe this way.

Self-Care Tips: **Breathe**

As you go through your day, pause now and then to experience how you are breathing. During your pause, notice what's happening around you, check in with yourself and add a short breathing exercise. Then proceed, with awareness, to your daily activities.

When you check in, just **feel where you are breathing.** Is your chest moving? Concentrate for a moment on breathing into your upper belly.

If you notice you are breathing quickly, slow your breath down by letting your breath out more slowly. **Smooth and quiet your breathing.**

When you feel stressed or angry, or just want to relax, **pay attention to the timing of your breath.** Count as you breathe in. Count as you breathe out. Without forcing, let your lungs empty more slowly and more completely. Allow your "out" breath to become up to two times longer than your "in" breath. This will help your body and mind to become more relaxed and calm.

If the person you support is agitated or is not feeling well, your calmness may help them. It can surely help you. **Try asking them to breathe with you.** Together, count the inhale and exhale out loud, softly and gently.

We encourage you to **try breathing practices.** Be patient and kind with yourself. Like most things, you will get better with practice. You will probably find that the benefits will increase with time.

Make breathing practice a habit. Add it to your daily routine. Practice during your caregiving activities. You can start your day with a few minutes of focusing on your breathing to help you start the day feeling calm. You can end the day with a breathing practice to relax as you fall asleep.

Nourish Yourself

Nourishing yourself with good food and thoughts will help you be a more effective caregiver.

Make sure you take time during the day to eat. This will fuel your body and mind and give you the energy you need to get through your many tasks.

Think about fueling your body:

- Do you know what foods make you feel well?
- Do you take time to prepare and eat healthy foods that give you energy?
- Do you gobble food mindlessly or pay attention to what you're eating?
- Do you enjoy an occasional self-indulgence as part of your self-care?

Mealtimes change when the person you are supporting changes. Eating habits, preferences, and abilities change as the person's condition worsens. Any meal can become a challenge. When you are caring for others and it's a busy day at work, it will be hard for you to have a pleasant, relaxed, and healthy meal. It's important not to neglect yourself.

Staying hydrated is especially important for both you and the people you are supporting. In general, experts recommend 6-8 cups of water a day. The people you support may not notice when they're thirsty. Without enough water, they may become dizzy, confused, or even develop a urinary tract infection. It may also be hard for you, with the demands of the job, to remember to drink throughout the day when you're at work.

Think about fueling your mind:

- What positive thoughts fill your mind with good feelings?
- What thoughts and messages help you feel strong?
- What is going right?
- What do you appreciate right now?

It's easy to notice what's going wrong—with you, with the person you are supporting, and with the world around you. Focus on what's going well and what you're grateful for. This takes a little work but it has a big payoff.

Self-Care Activity: **Nourish Your Body**

Eating is something we do everyday. We all have powerful habits attached to our eating patterns. This activity helps you slow down the process and pay greater attention to what fuels your mind and body.

Pause before you eat. Sit still for a moment.

Notice your sensations. What do you smell? How does the chair feel under your body? Pay attention to the floor under your feet. Check in with yourself. You might try closing your eyes and noticing how you feel right now. Are you hungry? Tired?

Breathe. Before you begin, take a few slow deep breaths.

As you proceed with your meal or snack, increase your awareness.

- Pay attention to the smells and flavors of what you are eating. See the colors on your plate. Feel the texture of the food—is it soft or crunchy?
- Notice how your focus shifts.
- Observe how your sensations change as you eat.

Pause again after you eat. Sit still for a moment.

Check in with yourself. What is different about how you feel right now? How does your body feel? What thoughts and feelings do you have?

Pay attention to how you are feeling. Don't judge it as good or bad, just be aware. Listen to your thoughts. Are you being kind to yourself?

After you are done, take a few slow deep breaths. This is time to rest and digest.

As you proceed with your day, **give thanks** for a moment's pause. Appreciate the food that fuels your body and gives you the energy you need. **Applaud yourself** for taking the time you need for nourishment.

Self-Care Activity: **Nourish Your Mind**

Many people dwell on the negative — what went wrong, what they want but don't have. You may find it hard to let go of a nasty remark from the person you are supporting, even though you realize that it's due to their condition. Thinking about these sorts of negatives, over and over again, can put you in a bad mood. The following activity helps you focus specifically on things that are going right:

"At the day program, we all pick up on each other's energy. It's like a bad attitude is contagious! I notice that if my energy is positive, the people at the program seem more cooperative. Also, my co-workers seem more cheerful."

This activity takes just a few minutes of quiet time. Decide if you are going to spend three minutes or five minutes. If you wish, set a timer. If you can't find five minutes, even one minute can help.

Start with a pause and a breath. Calm your mind and body.

Begin by thinking of something that went right in the last 24 hours. This can be something simple and obvious. For example, water came out of the faucet when you turned it on this morning. Did you see a beautiful garden as you were driving or riding by on the bus? Did someone you are supporting get dressed easily or have an enjoyable day?

Now, think of something you recently did well. Maybe you stayed patient in a difficult situation. Maybe you made someone laugh. Maybe you packed yourself a delicious lunch. Maybe you remembered to pause and breathe.

Continue to think of as many positive gifts and strengths as you can in the time you set aside.

You can do this activity silently, in your thoughts, or you can do it as a writing activity. Some people like to keep a small notebook where they can list what they feel grateful for. When they are feeling down, they go back and read what they wrote earlier.

Self-Care Tips: **Nourish Yourself**

Focus on nourishing yourself and taking the time to fuel your mind and body. You need to be strong to deal with the responsibilities of caregiving. Feed yourself well, with good food and positive thoughts. Add pauses and breathing exercises to your daily routines to feed and refresh your mind and body.

Take time to notice your physical surroundings and check in with your emotions as you go through each day. Notice when you are hungry or thirsty. Be kind to yourself by eating good healthy food when you need it. You will feel better and have more energy at work and at home.

Notice what, when, and how you eat. What makes you feel good? Notice what gives you energy in the morning. Pay attention to the moments that lift your spirits. See if you can repeat those experiences the next day.

Be especially sure that you **nourish yourself at stressful times.** For example, if you had a crisis at work or had extra pressure to complete paperwork, remember to take a break. Have a nourishing snack and take a moment to check-in with yourself.

Consider your “diet” of news, information, conversations, and energy that you take in every day. Are they nourishing? Do they give you energy and a positive attitude or lifestyle? What are you “feeding” yourself right now?

Notice what helps you relax in the evening and make it a regular habit.

On your way home, remember what went right during your shift and what you did that made the day go better.

Focus on what is strong in you. Think of a short phrase that is a positive reflection of you or of something you do well. When you feel down or stressed, silently repeat this phrase to yourself.

Laugh.

Make happiness a habit. Notice what is going right. Appreciate the small gifts in life. Fuel your mind with nourishing thoughts.

Move

Moving is important for self-care, for health, and for stress relief. **Keep your body moving.** Pay attention to your movements. Movement can be calming and can build your physical strength so you can be an effective caregiver.

Caregiving can be stressful. Supporting someone with memory challenges can be emotionally draining. It can be physically exhausting, too. You may have times when you just can't take another step or do another thing.

It may seem strange but **moving can make you less tired.** Moving gets your blood flowing and helps you breathe more deeply. People who are active during the day often sleep better. Better sleep means less fatigue.

Moving includes exercising on purpose. But moving also means using all your body parts. During the day, you move your head, neck, shoulders, hands, wrists, chest, hips, legs, and feet. Some parts of your body get moved more than others. You can add some extra movements while sitting or standing. This will help keep all your joints flexible.

Movement tells your brain to stay alert. Over time, moving your body helps you stay healthy and fight off illness. Moving with awareness can reduce stress and improve concentration. Both energetic movement, and very slow movement, can help reduce depression and anxiety.

Moving more means keeping active. Remind yourself to stand for a while, each hour, instead of sitting all day. Remember to move around instead of simply standing still.

Move with awareness. Notice the sensations of your body as you go from sitting to standing and from standing to walking. Notice what you are doing as you help others with their daily living activities. Pay attention to how it feels when you bend to pick something up or help someone stand.

Self-Care Activity: **Move**

This activity is a series of 8 gentle stretches. Do these slowly with awareness. Let your breath flow. Let the movement follow the breath. You can slow yourself down and focus your concentration by doing each move 3 to 5 times. Doing the whole series should take about 10 minutes.

You can do most of these sitting or standing. If you have balance problems, you may want to sit or, if you stand, stay near a chair or a wall.

1 Head up and down

- Breathe in as you bring your face upward and look up. Stay comfortable. Lengthen your neck. Don't tip your head too far back.
- Breathe out as you lengthen your neck, and bring your chin toward your chest, looking downward.
- Repeat this up and down head movement 3 to 5 times.

2 Head sideways

- Breathe in. Sit tall and bring your shoulders down and back.
- As you breathe out, tip your head to the right. Move your ear toward your shoulder. Face forward, not up or down.
- Breathe in, lengthen as you move your head back to upright.
- Breathe out and tip your head to the left, stretching gently.
- Breathe in as you move your head back to upright.
- Repeat this sideways head movement 3 to 5 times.

3 Turning head

- Breathe in. Lengthen your neck. Keep your body facing forward.
- As you breathe out, turn your head so you are facing to your right.
- Breathe in as you turn your head back to facing forwards.
- Breathe out as you turn your head to the left.
- Breathe in as you turn your head back to facing forwards.
- Repeat this head-turning movement 3 to 5 times.

4 Neck rolls

- Breathe out as you bring your chin toward your chest.
- As you breathe in, swoop your head up towards your left shoulder.
- Breathe out as you move your head down to center.
- Breathe in as you move your head up to your right shoulder.
- Repeat these neck rolls 3 to 5 times, gently swinging side to side.

5 Turtle stretch

- Sit with a straight back, looking forward.
- As you breathe in, gently slide your chin forward, sticking your head and neck out like a turtle poking out of its shell.
- As you breathe out, gently slide your head back to stretch the back of your neck. Try not to tip your head forward or back—keep your eyes focused straight ahead. Some people find it helpful to put a finger on their chin when they are learning this stretch.
- Repeat this turtle stretch for your neck 3 to 5 times.

6 Shoulder Rotations

- Sit or stand with a straight back, looking forward.
- As you breathe in, roll your shoulders backwards and up towards your ears.
- As you breathe out, roll your shoulders forward and downwards.
- Repeat this forward shoulder roll 3 to 5 times.
- Next, reverse direction. As you breathe out, roll your shoulders forward and up, breathe in while rolling them back and downwards.
- Repeat this backward shoulder roll 3 to 5 times.

7 Overhead stretch

- Sit with a straight back, looking forward.
- As you breathe in, slowly raise both arms out to your sides, palms down. At shoulder height, turn your palms up, continue to breathe in and stretch up.
- As you breathe out, slowly lower your arms, turning palms down at shoulder height, until they are back at your sides.
- Repeat this overhead stretch 3 to 5 times.

8 Side bends

- Sit with a straight back, looking forward.
- As you breathe in, slowly raise both arms over your head. If you can, interlace your fingers. Keep your arms and hands up.
- As you breathe out, slowly bend to the left.
- Breathe in as you come back up to center.
- As you breathe out, slowly bend to the right.
- Repeat these side bends 3 to 5 times.

9 End with a pause

- Pause, notice what's around you, and check in with yourself.
- Take a moment to recognize how you feel before you proceed back to your everyday activities.

Self-Care Activities: **Move with awareness**

Moving with awareness means paying attention to your body. Notice how it feels when your body is moving, stretching, or breathing. Notice how your body feels when you are resting and relaxed. Moving with awareness can be included as you exercise and as you go about your everyday activities. You can make mindful movement a part of any activity in your day: pushing a wheelchair, cleaning, walking, and commuting to and from work.

Standing Up and Sitting Down

We move from sitting to standing and from standing to sitting many times during the day. Explore what it is like to bring awareness to this body activity. Notice the feelings you have when you are sitting. Move with gentleness as you focus on what it's like to go from sitting to standing. Pay attention to the sensations in your muscles and bones. Focus on your balance as you rise or sit. Once you are standing, pause and breathe before starting your next task.

Wiping a Table

As you wipe the table, pay attention to the sounds around you. Notice how you move your hands back and forth or round and round. Be aware of the difference in how the table looks and feels before and after. When you are done, pause and breathe before starting your next task.

Helping Someone Get Dressed

Focus your awareness on the feeling, color, and texture of the person's clothes. Are they rough or smooth? Brightly colored or dull? Heavy or light? Pay attention to how you are standing. Notice how you move your arms and hands as you help the person put on or take off a shirt or coat. Notice if your mind tells "stories" about the task, such as, "They should do this themselves," or "I have other things to do." Gently return to the direct experience of your body. Just be in the moment, doing what you are doing.

Be curious about how your body feels. Move with kindness and gentleness. Appreciate what is right with your body in any given moment.

Self-Care Tips: Move

Once you learn the series of stretches described in this Guide, you can do one or more throughout the day. Many people like to do the whole series in the morning. Others find these stretches relaxing before bed. Some people stretch when they wake up and again before they go to sleep.

Before starting any exercise, it's a good idea to check with your doctor. If you have joint pain or other medical problems, your doctor can advise you about how to adjust the stretching routine.

Notes on stretching: Don't worry if you hear crunching noises in your neck, these are normal. However, you should not feel any pain or strong discomfort. If you do, skip the stretch that bothers you. If you feel dizzy, take a break until you feel normal. Drink some water. When you go back to the stretches, let your breath flow at a pace that comes naturally.

“Walk your dog three times a day, whether or not you have a dog.”
— Old saying

Fitting in movement:

- Involve the person you are supporting in moving, too. Play music and move together. Try music they like or enjoyed in the past. If they are in a chair, have them tap or clap and move their feet and legs.
- Pause regularly during the day. Check in with how your body and mind are feeling. Proceed with the day remaining aware of your movement.
- Don't forget the importance of moving throughout the day, even when you are in a tough situation. You can always fit in a small stretch.
- Try a few side bends while you are waiting for the person you are supporting to complete a task. Enjoy a shoulder rotation during a meeting or before a group activity.

Sleep

Sleep has many important benefits for memory, mood, energy, and overall physical health. It also has an effect on your job performance. You probably know that too little sleep makes kids tired and cranky, but it makes adults tired and cranky, too!

During the night, sleep helps you store and organize your memories and any new learning. Your body heals during sleep. Too little sleep can make you more likely to get sick, develop heart disease, or some other serious problem. Sleep is important for safety, too, and may help you to avoid accidents, such as those caused by drowsy driving.

"A good laugh and a long sleep are two of the best cures for anything."

— Irish Proverb

In addition to sleep, learn how to recharge during the day by building in times for rest and relaxation. Many people have a natural low-energy point in the afternoon. When that happens, do a one-minute refresher such as stretching, remember to breathe, and have an extra drink of water. Notice what works best to help you boost your energy.

Self-Care Activity: Sleep

Use your breathing practice sitting up before you get in bed or after you lie down. This will help you relax into a restful sleep.

- Sit straight in a chair or lie in your bed on your back.
- Put your left hand on your heart and your right hand on your belly.
- Breathe out through your mouth with a "whoosh" or a deep sigh.
- Breathe slowly and deeply into your belly. Notice the movement under your right hand as you breathe in and out.
- Imagine the air traveling from your nose to your toes and back again.
- Count as you breathe in. Count as you breathe out. Slowly lengthen your out-breath so it is longer than your in-breath.

Self-Care Tips: **Sleep**

Sleep and rest are important for your health. However, sometimes your schedule can make it hard to get the sleep you need. Many caregivers have said that their sleep improved dramatically after regular practice of the activities in this Guide. They find it easier to go to sleep, stay asleep, and they wake up refreshed.

A sleep mask is a practical tool. Many people have difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or even resting during the day.

- A sleep mask may be helpful by blocking out the light when you go to bed at night.
- A good night's sleep is important for both your body and mind. The sleep mask can remind you to take a moment for yourself from time to time.

Here are some tips for better sleep:

- You probably know that **caffeine** can keep someone awake, so it's often best to **quit drinking caffeinated drinks by 2 o'clock in the afternoon.** Experiment to see what works best for you, considering your work schedule.
- **Keep a small notepad and pen nearby.** Instead of worrying about what you have to do tomorrow, write it down to get it out of your mind!
- If you wake up in the night and are having trouble going back to sleep, pause and breathe. **Think thoughts that nourish your mind.** You may find it helpful to get up and move through the stretches described earlier.

Creating Self-Care Moments

Caregiving as a career can be very rewarding.

Caregiving can also be very draining. You are experiencing many changes and demands on the job and may have other challenges outside of work. While you may have little or no control over your situation, you may be able to control how you react physically, mentally and emotionally. By changing how you react, the situation still occurs, but you may feel less stressed.

Each individual you support will change as their illness progresses.

Your co-workers and your work environment may change, as will your life outside of work. When you learn to take care of yourself by following some of the suggestions in this Guide, it can help you on the job, in your career as a caregiver, and in your personal life.

Every caregiver's situation is unique. It's up to you to decide what works best for you in different stressful situations.

Pause and Breathe

There's great value when you stop for a minute, notice what's around you, and check in with yourself. This reminds you how it feels to step off the endless treadmill of doing.

Controlling your breathing can help you feel calm. This will help you regain a sense of control and stability when you have a bad day or the person you are supporting has a difficult moment.

After you pause and breathe, move back to your day with awareness.

Here are some ways pausing and breathing can help you with stress:

- You relax.
- You are more aware of how you feel and what you need.
- You don't react as quickly to a bad situation when you pause.
- You may become more aware of how others feel.
- You may feel more kind and caring towards both yourself and others.

Nourish yourself

Eating well nourishes your body. Your mind also needs nourishment through the many things you enjoy doing. Find ways to feed your whole self. It's important to find the right balance that works for you.

Move

For many people, moving more can help reduce stress. Moving your body can create positive changes in your body and your brain. It can calm and energize you and help you feel more in control. This may help your sleep and will boost your health over time.

Sleep

It is critical for your health to get enough sleep and rest. Your body needs this time to heal from the busyness of the day and from all that you do to care for the people you are supporting. Your mind needs to recharge, too.

Putting it all together

Once you recognize that you are beginning to feel overwhelmed, using these skills can help you manage the stress and the chaos.

- What other self-care skills and activities do you do?
- What things can you practice, or add to your day, that will help build strong self-care habits and routines?

Often, we can fit in self-care activities to the day as we go along. This Guide includes many tips that will help you add self-care moments to your week. Remember, even a minute to pause and breathe pays off.

Some self-care activities require planning. You may want to try to schedule some things that will nourish and refresh you. Use the chart on the next page to think through what you want to do for yourself.

Self-Care Activity: Planning Self-Care Moments

- Some categories of self-care activities are listed in the left-hand column. Add other things that will nourish you in the blank rows at the bottom.
- Note specific times you can work on the activities you choose.

Self-Care Activities: What I want to do...	When I could do this (days and times)
...build in a pause	
...practice breathing exercises	
...nourish my body	
...nourish my mind	
...move with awareness	
...stretch	
...do something just for me	

Self-Care Activity: **Creating Self-Care Moments**

This activity involves using Caregiver Affirmations.

Begin by focusing on your breath. Breathe fully, smoothly, and evenly.

Say one or more of these affirmations to yourself as you breathe. If you prefer, you can recite your favorite affirmations quietly, out loud with emotion and conviction, while seated or lying down, anytime, anywhere.

An affirmation is a positive statement of emotional support or encouragement. It helps you replace negative thoughts. Repeating positive affirmations can improve your mood and boost your confidence.

- I am finding strength, energy, and patience.
- I pay attention to and listen to what my body needs.
- I forgive myself when I make a mistake.
- I am dependable.
- I am learning every day.
- I accept that I will have difficult days from time to time.
- I ask for help when I need it.
- Even when there is chaos around me, I reach for calmness.
- I am thankful for the chance to help others.
- When I truly care for myself, I can more profoundly care for others.

Other positive statements I can say to myself:

Self-Care Tips: **Creating Self-Care Moments**

See if you can fit in a 10-minute early morning stretch.

Is the person you are supporting able to move about?

Maybe you can take a walk, stretch, or move to music together.

Music is often helpful for people with memory loss and it's good for you, too. It can be calming in the early evening, when people with memory challenges may experience confusion or anxiety. During the day, music can get both of you moving, or lift your spirits. It can be especially powerful and helpful to play music from when the person was young.

Take a short break with coffee or tea in your favorite mug.

Pack healthy snacks and meals to keep you going throughout the day. Plan your time so you don't end up skipping a meal altogether.

Find something enjoyable you can do together now.

Get some library books of peaceful scenes to share with the people you support when they are restless or they can't go out due to bad weather.

Reach out to your co-workers, your supervisor, and important people in your personal life.

This can help you to manage during tough times. Share your concerns or feelings with people who care about you and are willing to listen. As the old saying goes, "A burden shared is a burden halved."

"There are only four kinds of people in the world. Those who have been caregivers. Those who are currently caregivers. Those who will be caregivers, and those who will need a caregiver."

— Rosalyn Carter

Flexibility

Regular self-care helps you manage the demands of caregiving, so you do not become exhausted. This involves flexibility. Think of an elastic band. “*Healthy*” elastic bands can stretch and recover their shape. Overused elastic bands are “*unhealthy*” and break when they are stretched too much. Good self-care helps give you the strength you need to face stressful situations and to bounce back.

“[The ability to bounce back] comes from deep within us and from support outside us... It comes from analyzing how we process grief and from simply accepting that grief... I learned that when life pulls you under, you can kick against the bottom, break the surface, and breathe again.”

—Sheryl Sandberg,
Option B

Here are some tips to consider for thriving on the job (not just surviving each workday):

- Notice what goes well, even if you think it is very small.
- Let your co-workers know if you’re having a tough day.
- Support your co-workers when they are having a tough day.
- Share concerns with your supervisor.
- At the end of every shift, remind yourself about the moments that gave you a sense of accomplishment and purpose.
- Remain hopeful.

There is no book of rules to tell you exactly how to succeed as a professional caregiver. Training, supervision, and experience can all help. You can learn more about what

causes memory loss, how to manage difficult behaviors, and how to do each of your job duties. The tips in this Guide can help you discover the things that give you energy and help you bounce back in stressful situations.

Self-care comes from your daily routines and habits. You are the only one who can strengthen your self-care skills, habits, and routines. It’s up to you to help yourself get well, feel well, and stay well!

Resources

This Guide is designed for professional and paraprofessional caregivers. Separate Guides are available to use with the individuals you are supporting and for family caregivers.

We have created a video on self-care that accompanies this Guide to Caregiver Self-Care. The video leads you through the activities in this Guide. Many people have said that actually seeing the breathing and stretching exercises is especially helpful. The video can be used with, and by, anyone, as it does not specifically mention caregivers or memory loss.

To watch the video, go to <http://care2caregivers.com/>

Here are some resources for more information:

Pause and Breathe

- To learn more about focused awareness, the website www.mindful.org includes many short readings and practice suggestions.
- There are many videos and recordings online. You may enjoy using peaceful music and guided exercises as you pause and breathe.

Some of our favorite online resources are:

- Jon Kabat Zinn, [The Breathing Space](#) (3:48 min.) on YouTube
- NJ Center for Mindful Awareness:
<http://www.mindfulawarenessnj.com/>
- UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center:
<https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/>
- Some people use free apps to pause, breathe, and relax, such as [Insight Timer](#) or [Stop, Breathe & Think](#).

Nourish Yourself

- Information on healthy eating:
 - <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/>
 - <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-eating-plate/>
- Why it's important to drink water:
 - <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/the-importance-of-staying-hydrated>
- The description of gratitude for water coming out of your faucet comes from a 5-minute video by Brother David Steindl-Rast on YouTube. It's worth watching!

Move

- Simple at-home exercise ideas: <https://go4life.nia.nih.gov/>

Sleep

- You can find lots of information at www.sleep.org such as "Why caregivers should focus on better sleep"
- For tips on falling asleep, search for these articles on www.mindful.org
 - 5 steps to wind down and fall asleep
 - 3 mindful things to do before you fall asleep
- These sites offer some specific sleep exercises:
 - Jennifer Piercy on Insight Timer (<https://insighttimer.com>)
 - Search for "best breathing exercises for sleep" on <https://www.tuck.com>

References

The personal statements at the beginning of the Guide are based on the combined experiences of many caregivers. When the quote is from an identified person or a publication, the source is listed here.

The “our breathing is always there” paragraph was inspired by content on the website for Plum Village, which is also the source of “Breathing in I know that I am breathing in. Breathing out I know that I am breathing out.”

The “seatbelt” quote comes from Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Breath: A Practice for Our Busy Lives*.

The quote on positive energy is adapted from Melissa Meltzer Warehall’s story, [“From Gloom to Gratitude”](#) on National Public Radio, May 5, 2019.

“Happiness is a habit” comes from Juanita Nolan.

The definition of “affirmation” is based on the one from www.mindtools.com

The “move” self-care activity and controlled breathing are adapted from and used with, permission of the Himalayan Yoga Teacher Training Program.

We also drew on these publications for inspiration and reference:

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