

Compassion for the Caregiver:

Tips For Preventing Burnout

by Debra Crockett, MSW, LCSW



"There are four kinds of people in the world: those who have been caregivers; those who currently are caregivers; those who will be caregivers; and those who will need caregivers." (Carter, 1997).

Caregiving for someone with a long-term illness is a labor of love, however the sacrifice may come at a physical, emotional, and spiritual cost to the one providing the care. When a patient suffers from sleeplessness due to sundowning from conditions like dementia, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and other related conditions (can include cancer), their sleeps patterns can be affected causing wandering, confusion, and frequent awakenings.

Because a caregiver has to remain hypervigilant while caring for their patients, their own well-being can be impacted. Caregiving often requires an extensive amount of time outside of normal responsibilities; that may involve:

- Disruption
- Family adjustment
- Strain in other relationships
- Navigating the finances of their loved ones
- Physical strain of assisting loved ones as their physical condition deteriorates

The issues are magnified if the Caregiver is employed because they must also navigate work responsibilities.

Here are some tips to help you avoid the physical and emotional symptoms of burnout:

- Take time out for yourself – Taking time for yourself even for brief periods during the day and more extended periods during the week gives you the opportunity to mentally reset from responsibilities.
- Go outside – Fresh air is important even if it's for a short period, because your body is getting oxygen and vitamin D, which helps your physical and emotional well-being.
- Ask for help – Asking for help, including reaching out for friends, reduces the isolation associated with caregiving and provides emotional and physical support.



- Rest – Rest is essential because it allows you to physically reset from the caregiving demands; a full 7-8 hours of sleep may not be possible so taking shorter rest breaks is essential.
- Exercise – Movement, including stretching even for brief periods, is important in reducing stress and tension. It will also provide a burst of energy

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you need to get through your day. Breathwork allows your body to physically reset.

- Write – Journaling is important as a form self-expression and emotional release. Gratitude journaling redirects your focus from your challenges and to see the positive in everyday life.
- Reach out to friends – Spending time with friends is essential for a caregiver because it lowers stress, prevents isolation, and protects both physical and mental health. Even a phone call with a friend can help to provide perspective as they take the time out to hear about your day, it can help you to feel heard and less like you're alone.
- Have Self-Compassion & Patience with Yourself – Caregivers may have a sense of inadequacy because of the multitude of responsibilities. Remember to be gentle with yourself, acknowledge that you are doing your best and give yourself grace.

Compassion for the Caregivers is dear to me because it is a lived experience. I was responsible for my mother's care during her dementia diagnosis, and I am currently providing care for my sister who has multiple illnesses. During that period and now, I follow those tips and I saw a big difference on how I was able to manage daily stress, reduce physical strain, and prevent burnout. I learned how to rely on God to see me through the difficult challenges of managing life while I previously cared for my mother and as I currently care for my sister.

Isaiah 40: 30-31 is a source of inspiration. *Even youths get tired and weary; even strong young men clumsily stumble. But those who wait for the LORD's help find renewed strength; they rise up as if they had eagles' wings, they run without growing weary, they walk without getting tired.*

A minister who preached from this scripture said this during a conference, "God will give you wings to soar over short-term circumstances, legs to run through long-term circumstances, and feet to walk through things that will not change." May God give you His abundant grace and strength during your caregiving journey.

Carter, R. (1997). Remarks of Rosalynn Carter at the family caregiving issues and the national family caregiver support program [Transcript]. The Carter Center. cartercenter.org

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