

Respite care: how taking care of yourself helps others

BY JANE SADOWSKY-EMMERTH

According to AARP, 56 percent of New York's Family Caregivers experience stress trying to balance their jobs and families. It's no secret that family caregiving is a demanding job and trying to do it alone can lead to additional stress and serious health issues for those providing care. And while caring for family members can be considered a "labor of love," that doesn't make juggling work, family and other commitments any less stressful when someone needs special care at home.

Taking the time to seek support and maintain your own health is key to managing your role as a family caregiver and "me time" should not be seen as a "selfish" endeavor. If you're overwhelmed by the daily routine of caregiving, your patience and compassion may wear thin, making it harder to connect with the person you're caring for, causing you both to experience feelings of guilt, resentment and lack of personal fulfillment.

Respite care is a short-term break from caregiving. It may be having a friend or neighbor sit with your family member for an hour or two while you do chores, taking them to a Social Adult Day Center while you run an errand, or even arranging for a home health aide to stay with them for a weekend so you go to a grandchild's wedding or graduation.

As a registered nurse with Partners in Care, a licensed home care agency affiliated with the Visiting Nurse Service of New York, my colleagues and I help family caregivers manage caring for elderly family members—which in turn al-

lows caregivers to take much-needed time for themselves.

We hope these tips and tricks will help you feel more energetic, focused, and reinvigorated about your caregiving role. You may even be able to pick up tips on new ways to tackle common problems you face as a caregiver, helping to make the caregiving journey a more enjoyable and rewarding experience for both you and the loved one in your care.

1. **Accept Help:** Sometimes it feels like we have to do everything ourselves, especially when it comes to family, but we must remember we cannot do it all alone. Getting help from others is not a sign of weakness, and may actually play a vital role in sustaining personal care for your loved one. Write down some specific things people can do — like picking up prescriptions, dropping off a meal, chauffeuring to a doctor's appointment, etc. Keep a running list of go-to tasks people can help with so when they offer, you have an answer!

2. **Take a Break from Caregiving:** Everyone needs the opportunity and time to recharge, even the most devoted of caregivers. Although formal respite programs like we offer at Partners in Care are hard to find in some communities, it may be possible to get your family member into an adult day care program that will be beneficial for your loved one, and provide you with some time to yourself. And, along with my first tip, remember that if someone offers help it is okay to ask if they can stay with your loved one for an hour or two.

3. **Find a Community:** Again, you are not in this alone. There are many people experiencing the same wor-

ries and stresses as you in this situation, and they can offer the opportunity for a support system and sounding board so you don't feel so isolated. Reach out to other caregivers in your situation, and look for opportunities to give and get support. Recognizing that the work you do is important and that you're not alone in your situation will help you reap the most positive benefits from your caregiving, which leads to my next tip...

4. **Stay Positive:** Think actively about the positive aspects of caregiving. If your family member is able to communicate, talking about the things in life you've shared can be rewarding for both of you. Take time to look at old photos or videos, chat about people you love, or reminisce about trips you've taken. Using this time to strengthen your connection to one another can help you feel good about the work you're doing and give your loved one a chance to express their thanks too.

5. **Don't Feel Guilty:** At the end of the day, know that you are doing all you can as a caregiver and should never feel guilty. You love and care about this person, and even if they can't show it, both they and everyone around you knows this deep down. You are a human being and are doing as much as you can.

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