Caregivers–Let’s Take Care of You!

Your Health Is Important Too

It’s easy to become so busy taking care of someone else’s health that we neglect our own. Here’s a list of the medical checkups you should be having for your own good health:

- **Dental checkups** once or twice a year
- **Hearing checkups** as needed, and eye exams annually after age 65
- **General medical exam** at least every two years, including blood pressure checks
- **Cholesterol test** every five years (or as recommended by your doctor)
- **Breast exams** every year after age 40, and mammograms every year after age 50 (earlier if your family has a history of breast cancer)
- **PAP smears** for women every one to three years up to age 65, especially for sexually active women
- **Annual screening for colon cancer** after age 50, especially for anyone with a family history of colon cancer
- **Prostate cancer screening** every year after age 50 for men, sooner if there is family history
- **Flu vaccinations** every year after age 65
- **A pneumococcal vaccination** once after age 65

Source: The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, a division of the Department of Health and Human Services. These are general guidelines; consult your doctor with questions about your personal medical situation.

Reaching Out

Listen or Share

What happens at a support group meeting? People talk! It is a place to express feelings—of joy, of sadness, of anger or frustration—among a group of people who can listen and share similar experiences. It’s a chance to meet others to exchange ideas, thoughts, and resources. Ask your local religious organization, disease chapter, hospital or Area Agency on Aging if there is a support group near you. If there are no support groups in your area, ask those organizations about starting one.

Caregivers Make the Difference!

Caregivers are known to have:

- Renewed faith and deeper spiritual meaning
- Closer ties to family and loved ones
- A sense of purpose and fulfillment
- Sympathy, patience, and understanding
- A sense of personal satisfaction and pride
- Valuable experience to pass on to others
- Gratitude

Self-Care Check

- How many servings of vegetables did I eat yesterday?
- How often did I reach out to a friend for support and laughter?
- What did I do this week just for me?
- Can I make time for a walk today?

Back-Up Help You Deserve a Break

Sometimes friends, family, or neighbors will say, “If there is anything I can do to help, please let me know.” Try saying “yes.” The next time someone offers to help, say “In fact, it would be so helpful if you could ________ this weekend so that I can have a little break!”

To get started, fill in this chart, or make your own. Professional caregivers: use this in your personal life and when talking to the person in care’s family members.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>WHO CAN HELP - NAMES/ PHONE NUMBERS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laundry</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Errands/Grocery Shopping</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooking (soups or casseroles)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Heavy house work</td>
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<td>Light house work</td>
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<td>Yard work</td>
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<td>Understanding legal documents or finances</td>
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<td>Driving to appointments</td>
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<td>Taking the person for a walk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Entertaining the person your care</td>
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How Would You Handle This?

Easing the Way to Day Care

Question: I have heard that day care centers are a great support resource, but the person in my care refuses to go. What do I do?

Answer: Author and caregiver Jacqueline Marcell describes what she would do to ease the transition to a new caregiver:

“First, I’d have a social worker call my father a few times and develop a relationship with him over the phone. Then I’d have her “drop in” to say hello because she was “in the neighborhood.”

Then, after taking my parents out to a relaxing lunch, I’d casually drive by the day care center and say, “Why don’t we drop in and say hello to that nice lady, Mary, who was so sweet to stop by the other day?” I’d have an appointment already set up so we could take a tour and meet the rest of the staff and other seniors. Then, a few days later, I’d go with my parents to lunch at the center and help the social workers make them feel comfortable.”

Caregivers are some of the busiest people in the world. By some estimates, the average caregiver day is 18 hours long. No wonder collapsing in front of the TV is the easiest thing to do with a free moment. But watching TV can actually cause more stress and depression.

Instead, make a date with yourself to explore a local park, wander through a thrift shop, visit a museum, sit in a coffee shop to read a book, or simply listen to music. We don’t need to wait for a friend for a date. Use the Back-Up Help Chart to find some free time for you.