Article Series Caregivers

# 7 Ways to Focus on Yourself While Caring for Someone Else

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All Caregivers

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Being a caregiver often translates to pouring your energy into others while running on empty yourself.

One reason this happens is that caregivers may face a number of invisible pressures, and their needs may be overlooked by friends and family members. Here are some of the invisible pressures caregivers face:

- **Check-ins often focus on health updates:** People often focus solely on the person who is ill or recovering, asking, “How’s your mom?” or “Is there any change?” In these moments, well-meaning family and friends may forget to acknowledge that you, the caregiver, is also living through this experience. Your emotions, stress, and exhaustion are rarely the center of the conversation.
- **Your social life often shrinks when you’re a caregiver:** Because caregiving can dominate your schedule and mental space, you may be less likely to go to social events or keep up with your hobbies, work, or passions. Over time, your identity can become reduced to “the caregiver” rather than a whole person with dreams and needs of your own.
- **Emotional support often is given to the person with the illness, not the caregiver:** Even though you may be dealing with grief, uncertainty, or anticipatory loss, others often direct emotional support toward the person living with cancer, without noticing that you’re carrying the weight of both your loved one’s needs and your own unspoken emotional load.
- **Caregivers often become so skilled at care, friends forget they need support too:** Friends, coworkers, or even extended family may unconsciously assume you’re always available for caregiving — expecting you to handle logistics, make decisions, or provide updates, often without offering help or flexibility in return.

These invisible pressures can accumulate and take a real toll on physical and mental health. In a 2020 report, *Caregiving in the US*, almost one in four caregivers surveyed said that caregiving has “made their own health worse.”

Even as you care for a loved one, tending to your own needs is essential. Rebuilding a connection with yourself — even in small, simple ways — can replenish your mental health and restore a sense of wholeness in the midst of caregiving.

Connecting with yourself means making time to relax and check in with your wellbeing, both physical and mental, and identifying your own needs. It can start simply by sitting in a quiet room and taking some slow deep breaths to help manage your stress while reminding yourself that your own well-being matters.

Try these seven **Microsteps** to help you reconnect with your own needs as you navigate your caregiving journey.

**Devoting five minutes a day to writing about your thoughts and feelings in a journal.**

Journaling is a great technique that can help you process emotions and may reduce stress. Doing it by hand on paper can help you focus and avoid digital distractions.

**Writing down positive affirmations like, “I am doing valuable, meaningful work," and “I am relaxed and peaceful.”** Consider reading them aloud to yourself. Studies have found that affirmations may reduce stress levels.

**Practicing daily mindfulness or relaxation techniques during daily routines.**

Consider “stacking” a mindfulness habit on something you already do, such as time spent in the morning drinking coffee or taking a mindful moment during lunch. Mindfulness and relaxation techniques like deep breathing exercises or meditation can help regulate stress and anxiety, making it easier to cope with daily demands.

**Reaching out to a friend or loved one, even if just for a brief chat.**

Talking to friends about what you are going through may be helpful. Although there may be times when your caregiving duties mean you can’t be with friends in person, a text exchange or a phone conversation may help you maintain the connection.

**Making time each week to do one thing you enjoy.**

Stepping away from your responsibilities for a few minutes each day can help you recharge. Consider taking time to read a few pages of a book, take a short walk or just have quiet time.

**Joining an in-person or online support group for caregivers.**
Connecting with others who are navigating similar journeys and sharing ideas can be helpful and comforting, and you may make new friends in the process.

**Ending your day by naming three things you are grateful for that brought you joy or meaning.**

Practicing gratitude can reconnect you with what matters most and help you find hope and purpose, even during difficult days.

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