Taking Care of YOU: Self-care for family caregivers

**Tool #1: Reducing and understanding STRESS.**

1. **Recognize warning signs early**. These might include irritability, sleep problems, and forgetfulness.
2. **Identify sources of stress**. Ask yourself, “What is causing stress for me?” Sources of stress might be that you have too much to do, family disagreements, feelings of inadequacy, or the inability to say no.
3. **Identify what you can and cannot change**. Remember, we can only change ourselves; we cannot change another person. When you try to change things over which you have no control, you will only increase your sense of frustration.
4. **Take action**. Taking some action to reduce stress gives us back a sense of control and can be simple activities like walking and other forms of exercise, gardening, meditation, or having coffee with a friend.

**Tool #2: Setting GOALS**

1. **Take a break** from caregiving.
2. **Get help with caregiving tasks** like bathing and preparing meals.
3. We are more likely to reach a goal if we break it down into **smaller action steps**. Once you've set a goal, ask yourself, “What steps do I take to reach my goal?”  Then get started!

Possible **ACTIONS:**

1. Make an appointment for a physical checkup.
2. Take a half-hour break once during the week.
3. Walk three times a week for 10 minutes.

**Tool #3: Asking for Help from others**

1. **Consider the person’s special abilities and interests**. If you know a friend enjoys cooking, ask for help with meal preparation.
2. **Resist asking the same person repeatedly.**
3. **Pick the best time to make a request**. Timing is important. A person who is tired and stressed might not be available to help.
4. **Prepare a list of things that need doing.** The list might include errands, yard work, or a visit with your loved one. Let the “helper” choose what she would like to do.
5. **Be prepared for hesitance or refusal**. Try not to take it personally when a request is turned down. The person is turning down the task, not you. Try not to let a refusal prevent you from asking for help again. The person who refused today may be happy to help at another time.
6. **Use “I” statements to make specific requests**: “I would like to go to church on Sunday. Would you stay with Grandma from 9 a.m. until noon?”

**Tool #4: Talk with your physician and Health Care Team**

1. **Prepare questions ahead of time.** Make a list of your most important concerns and problems. Issues you might want to discuss with the physician are changes in symptoms, medications or general health of the care recipient, your own comfort in your caregiving situation, or specific help you need to provide care. Make sure you let him/her know what your concerns are in terms of daily care/health.
2. **Enlist the help of the nurse**. The nurse can answer questions about various tests and examinations, preparing for surgical procedures, providing personal care, and managing medications at home.
3. **Make sure your appointment meets your needs**. When you schedule your appointment, be sure you convey clearly the reasons for your visit so that sufficient time is scheduled for the visit.
4. **Call ahead.** Before the appointment, check to see if the doctor is on schedule. Remind the receptionist of special needs when you arrive at the office.
5. **Take someone with you.** A companion can ask questions you feel uncomfortable asking and can help you remember what the physician and nurse said. And keep you focused on the priority questions you need answers too “today”.
6. **Use assertive communication and “I” messages**. Enlist the medical care team as partners in care. Present what you need, what your concerns are, and how the doctor and/or nurse can help. Use specific, clear “I” statements like the following: “I need to know more about the diagnosis; I will feel better prepared for the future if I know what's in store for me.” Or “I am feeling rundown. I'd like to make an appointment for myself and my husband next week.” Or “I need a way for my mother to sleep at night as I am now exhausted being up every two hours at night with her.”

For the complete article, please see:Family Caregiver Alliance. (2009). Taking care of you: Self-care for family caregivers. <https://www.caregiver.org/print/227>