Caregiver’s Quick Guide to Self-care

So you say you’re a caregiver…
That must mean you’re a pro at self-care too. Let’s check:

> Are you eating well?
> Are you controlling stress?
> Are you taking good care of your body?
> Are you taking regular breaks and socializing?

You’re not!

Well, that’s not surprising. According to the Evercare Study of Caregivers in Decline, “… (51%) [of caregivers] said they do not have time to take care of themselves and almost half (49%) said they are too tired to do so.”

But if you stop to think about it, there’s nothing more important than taking care of yourself. What would happen if you were to lose your ability to be a caregiver? Who would take care of your loved ones?

You need to be strong, healthy, and happy to do a good job as a caregiver and that requires self-care. You don’t need to spend money, follow complicated rituals, or even leave your house. The goal is to support the basics (mind, body, and spirit) without adding complications to your life.

Mind
There’s no doubt that caregiving can be stressful and that uncontrolled stress can lead to a number of health issues including: panic attacks, insomnia, high blood pressure and worse. The good news is that dealing with stress and worry can be as simple as taking a few deep breaths. Research shows that deep breathing causes the body to have a “relaxation response” that counteracts stress related issues.

Follow these simple steps for immediate stress relief:
- Close your eyes to remove the stimulation from your surroundings
- Breath in – use a count of 4-5
- Hold your breath – just a couple of seconds
- Blow out – make the exhale a little longer than the inhale

During this exercise be sure to inhale and exhale fully. Some experts say it’s best to inhale and exhale through your nose only, but colds and allergies can make mouth breathing the best option.

Body
How often are you grabbing food on the run, skipping exercise, and losing sleep? Stop it. Simplified self-care routines are better than nothing at all.

Skip “fast” and package foods. Instead make large batches of nutritious food that can be frozen. Soups, pastas, and rice dishes are natural choices for freezing. These items have long shelf lives and reheat well. Food is the foundation of your health; treat it that way.

Use moderate exercise to create energy in your body. This will make all of your chores much easier. Something as simple as stretching can make the difference. Also, try basic exercises like sit-ups,
push-ups, and squats. Modify push-ups for beginners by using the edge of a cupboard or a sink. The Internet is full of great guidance on basic exercise.

**Spirit**

Nurture your spirit. It’s not necessarily our duties that cause us to feel stressed and overworked, but our perception of those duties. If you don’t make an effort to take care of your own spirit, everything else will feel like hard work. It’s important to know what makes you feel nurtured, loved, and well cared for.

Prayer and/or meditation are great ways to reconnect with yourself. The constant physical and mental demands of caregiving can cause us to feel fractured and abused. We need to take time for ourselves to be quiet, and to reconnect with our own needs.

And be sure to have fun. PLAY! Call a friend, toss a ball in the air, doodle on a piece of paper. Do anything that isn’t necessary and gives you joy.

Life is short so make sure that you’re caring for yourself as well as you care for others.