

EXTENSION COMMUNITY

Health & Family Caregiving

People who care for others put their own health at risk.

As you take on more responsibility for someone else, you may see your physical health, mental status, or emotional well-being decline. The number of hours and level of care provided increases the potential health risk for the caregiver. Some of these effects may be serious, while others may be addressed through certain lifestyle changes. However, being aware of this as a potential problem is the first step to remaining in good health.



Family Caregiving Can Affect the Caregiver's Health

Good health is important to everyone, but as a caregiver, the consequences of poor health extend far beyond you - they are likely to affect friends and family in addition to the person for whom you're caring.

One of the primary reasons for someone moving to a residential facility is because of the ill health of the caregiver. In fact, two researchers in the field have gone so far as to say that the main factor for being a successful caregiver is good health.

In light of these facts, one of the most important tasks that a caregiver can complete is to set aside time and energy to devote to his or her own health. This may include such things as arranging time for exercise, rest, and eating balanced meals. One way to accomplish this is by simply asking others for assistance or arranging for services. People are often happy to help if they know specifically what is expected and needed from them. Many organizations and agencies may be able to provide services for a fee, or for free, depending upon eligibility requirements.



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Research shows, too, that caregivers with more support have better health, so asking for help can have a variety of positive benefits.

Limiting alcohol use, keeping a sense of humor, and joining a support group in the local community or through various online, Internet-based support groups, are other beneficial behaviors toward health maintenance. Some caregivers report that they find talking with family and friends, praying, and educating themselves about caregiving to be helpful.

Caregivers need to remember their own medical needs as well. Visiting the family physician for your own routine care, taking medications as prescribed, and getting a yearly flu shot are examples.

Remember that a caregiver provides care, and this needs to include caring for yourself as well as for others.

For more information, visit these resources at the University of Maine and Colorado State University:

- <http://www.umext.maine.edu/onlinepubs/htmlpubs/4206.htm>
- <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/columnha/ha04053.html>

References

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Brought to you by members of the eXtension Family Caregiving Community of Practice

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