

Arc Guide to Caregiver Stress

Caregiving can be wonderful and life giving. Yet, stress is a challenge that many face. It can be difficult to take care of your needs when you are caring for loved ones. Even so, it is important to prioritize self-care. Self-care isn't selfish; self-care is a way for you to show the same care for yourself that you give to others.

Stress manifests in a variety of ways, like feeling tired or overwhelmed. It may cause you to lose interest in activities you once enjoyed. Each caregiver copes with stressors in different ways.

This guide is an overview of ideas that may help you address stressors in your life.

ASKING FOR HELP

Receiving help can be a great aid when you feel overwhelmed. Asking for help from family and friends can be difficult for most. Yet, people often want to help, but are not sure how. Here are some tips for asking for help:

- Create a list of family and friends who you feel may want to help. Think about that individual's interests and abilities. Ask them to meet with you one-to-one to discuss areas of support.
- Write down a list of activities that you would be willing to ask others to assist you with such as:
 - Meal planning
 - Grocery shopping
 - Transportation to appointments
 - Laundry
 - Having someone stay with the individual you are caring for
- Use "I" statements to ask for assistance. For example: "I haven't been able to cook recently and I would love to make this dish. It's difficult to cook and care for _____. Would you be able to spend time with _____ while I cook? Then, we can share the meal together."
 - If they turn down your request, try not to get discouraged! If the individual seems hesitant you could say, "You can think about it and get back to me."

For further information or advocacy services, contact The Arc Greater Twin Cities at 952-920-0855 or visit www.arcgreatertwincities.org. *This document is not legal advice, and should not be construed as such. Thus, no information herein should replace the sound advice of an attorney.*

BREATHING TECHNIQUES

Sometimes, family and friends aren't available during high stress times. There are other options available to you. The following are breathing techniques for slowing down your body and mind during a stressful moment.

1. THE MEASURED BREATH

- You can sit or stand, but be sure to soften up a little before you begin. Make sure your hands are relaxed, and your knees are soft.
- Drop your shoulders and let your jaw relax.
- Now breathe in slowly through your nose and count to four, keep your shoulders down and allow your stomach to expand as you breathe in.
- Hold the breath for a moment.
- Now release your breath slowly and smoothly as you count to seven.
- Repeat for a couple of minutes.

2. THE BUMBLE BEE BREATH

- Relax your shoulders
- Close your throat slightly so you can hear your breath when you breathe in
- Cover your ears with your thumbs and your eyes with your fingers
- Keep your lips closed but lightly and your teeth slightly apart with your jaw relaxed and breathe out slowly making a long, low humming sound
- Make your exhalation long and smooth
- Repeat 5-10 times
- Then sit with long slow breaths for a couple of minutes and enjoy the peace.

3. BELLY BREATHING FOR RELAXATION

- Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose. Make sure your shoulders are down and relaxed. In this exercise, your stomach should expand, but your chest should rise very little. So, if you want, you can place one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest so you can feel how you are breathing.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth. As you blow air out, purse your lips slightly, but keep tongue and jaw relaxed. You may hear a soft "whooshing" sound as you exhale. That's good, listen for that sound every time your practice and learn to value it as the sound of relaxation.
- Repeat this breathing exercise for several minutes. Make your outgoing breath as long and smooth as you can. The out breath is the key to relaxation so give

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it your full attention and practice breathing out in a long slow controlled breath and you will quickly feel the benefit.

Self-Care Activities

- Ask yourself what is important to you and what you like to do
- Consider things you used to enjoy, but haven't don't in a while
- Journaling
- Exercising
- Getting enough sleep
- Eating healthy food
- Engage in activities that help you create meaning, such as praying or meditating
- Utilize respite resources

References: <http://www.anxietyslayer.com/journal/3-anxiety-breathing-techniques-you-can-practice-anywhere.html>