

Mental Health Tips for Caregivers During Coronavirus

The coronavirus outbreak adds stress to caregiving

To say that the coronavirus outbreak is a challenging time is an understatement, especially for already stressed caregivers. Fear and anxiety, along with self-isolation, cause strong or overwhelming emotions and may even contribute to depression. On top of that, extra caregiving responsibilities can lead to fatigue, anger, or resentment.

To protect your health and overall well-being, taking care of your mental health has become even more essential.

Maintain a regular daily routine and healthy lifestyle

In times of uncertainty, having a regular daily routine provides some comforting structure and predictability. Plus, maintaining a healthy lifestyle by eating well, moving our bodies, and getting fresh air and sun will boost our health, well-being, and immune system.

Many caregivers already have a daily routine because they're caring for an older adult who needs one. But if you've let your own routine lapse in the past few weeks, go back to it for a couple of weeks to see if it improves your well-being.

For example, go to sleep and wake up around the same time every day. Get dressed and ready for the day, as you did before the pandemic. Eat meals at regular times and fit in some fresh air and exercise each day.

Improve sleep

As a caregiver, sleep is often in short supply and isn't always the best quality. With coronavirus worries and self-isolation challenges on top of reduced support, it might be even tougher now to get a good night's sleep. But rest is one of the most effective ways to boost the immune system and improve well-being.

To improve sleep quality, we've got some helpful articles:

- Relax and fall asleep faster – <https://dailycaring.com/this-battle-tested-technique-helps-caregivers-fall-asleep-in-minutes/>
- Meditations to soothe you into deep sleep – <https://dailycaring.com/improve-caregiver-sleep-with-5-relaxing-guided-meditations-for-deep-sleep/>
- Weighted blankets for physically calming your body so you can sleep better (they're not just for people with dementia) – <https://dailycaring.com/weighted-blankets-in-dementia-care-reduce-anxiety-and-improve-sleep/>

Focus on what you can control and limit “what if” thinking

The news is scary. Individuals, companies, or other organizations might be doing things that you don't agree with. But there's nothing you can do about them. So don't worry about the things that are outside of your control – it will only make you anxious and angry.

Instead, let go and focus only on what you **can** control.

For example, you could limit news consumption, wash your hands, stay at home, stay 6 feet away from people if you must go out, wear a face covering, and regularly clean surfaces in your home.

The same goes for “what if” thinking. During a time like this, it's natural to fall into negative spirals where you imagine a variety of worst-case scenarios. Rein in those thoughts by imagining some positive “what if” scenarios (like, what if nobody in my family gets sick?) – after all, positive things also happen.

Then, come back to focus on the present reality and the things you **can** control.

Lighten up on yourself

The COVID-19 pandemic is a stressful time that has forced major lifestyle changes on everyone. So we shouldn't expect ourselves to adjust right away and be able to do everything that we had been doing.

Things will be forgotten or just won't get done, plans will change, and you'll have episodes of frustration and anger. That **doesn't** mean that you're doing a bad job as a caregiver.

It means that you're human and you're taking on a lot right now, both physically and emotionally. So give yourself a break. You're doing your best to get through a really challenging time.

The first step is to notice when you're being hard on yourself or holding yourself to an unfair standard. The next step is to use positive self-talk to give yourself a break from self-criticism. Speak to yourself like a kind, supportive friend would.

Mini breaks throughout the day

As much as you need and deserve a long break, taking tiny breaks throughout the day will improve your physical and emotional health and help you keep going. These much-needed breaks relieve stress, keep you focused on important tasks, and help you think more clearly.

The most important thing is to find a place where you can be alone. That could be your room, the bathroom, the car, a corner of the porch or yard, your front step, or just outside your front door.

Our top mini break suggestions:

- Throughout the day, consciously relax your jaw, neck, and shoulders to relieve overall tension in your body. Set an alert on your phone to get regular reminders.
- Drink some water and have a healthy snack.
- Watch a funny show or video clip.
- Call a good friend.
- Move and stretch your body to loosen tense muscles and get your blood flowing.
- Read a chapter of a book.

Remember, you are not alone

It's never been more important to connect with other people. Everyone's lives may be different, but we're all going through this pandemic together. Reach out to supportive family and friends and spend some time talking on the phone or have a cup of tea together over a video call.

To connect with fellow caregivers who are in situations similar to yours, join an online caregiver support group where you can get support 24/7.

Use humor to relive tension

Life has changed dramatically and some of the things that are happening right now are pretty funny. Give yourself permission to notice and laugh when something is funny. Laughter eases tension and makes life more positive.

You could even use social media in a positive way by following accounts with positive, funny memes about life during a pandemic. When you need a mood boost, scroll through and have a good laugh.

Taken from: <https://dailycaring.com/coronavirus-and-caregiver-mental-health-8-coping-tips/>

When Giving is All We Have

By: Alberto Ríos

One river gives

Its journey to the next.

We give because someone gave to us.

We give because nobody gave to us.

We give because giving has changed us.

We give because giving could have changed us.

We have been better for it,

We have been wounded by it –

Giving has many faces: It is loud and quiet,
Big, though small, diamond in wood-nails.

Its story is old, the plot worn and the pages too,
But we read this book, anyway, over and again:

Giving is, first and every time, hand to hand,
Mine to yours, yours to mine.

You gave me blue and I gave you yellow.
Together we are simple green. You gave me

What you did not have, and I gave you
What I had to give – together, we made

Something greater from the difference.

"This poem talks about giving to those that gave to us. We give because it makes us feel better; it changes us. Giving to others can come in big or small amounts; it can be shown to everyone or not seen at all." Alberto Rios



- You can choose to count up to five, then repeat back at one, to make sure your attention doesn't wander

Box breathing is helpful during extreme stress, where you practice the following process:

- inhale for a count of 4,
- hold your breath for a count of 4, exhale for a count of 4,
- wait at the very end of the exhale for a count of 4, and repeat.
- This is a very deep breathing exercise that has been shown to calm and regulate the autonomic nervous system.

Source: <https://www.headspace.com/meditation/breathing-exercises>

Stress and Breathing

Moment to moment, you determine your level of tension & stress in two ways:

1. Your breathing (holding your breath or chest breathing sends your body into fight or flight).
2. Your thoughts (are they hurried, worried, angry, or fearful?).

You can control and change both. Notice when your body begins to tense up, or you feel irritated, hurried or worried.

Immediately do two things:

1. Slow and deepen your breathing.
2. Choose thoughts that calm and empower you.
 - I have faith in my ability to handle this situation.
 - I can do what I can do, and that is all, and good enough!
 - Step by step.
 - I am okay.
 - I am grateful for all I have.
 - My moods are even regardless of what is happening around me.

Source: <https://www.robinrose.com/>

There are countless techniques you can practice, including breathing exercises for stress, increased energy, and general relaxation.

The simplest breathing technique is to count your breaths.

- You start by counting 1 on the inhale, 2 on the exhale, 3 on the inhale, and so forth.



Family Caregiver Support Group

This support group is a virtual space created just for you, to find support, care and understanding as we share our experiences as caregivers.

The group meets on the 1st & 3rd Wednesdays of each month from 10:00 – 11:30 am. Once registered, there is no set commitment. Come when you can.

To register, contact the
Aging and Disability Resource Center at
360-694-8144 or iaclark@dshs.wa.gov.

UPCOMING CLASSES:

Fall Family Caregiver Free ONLINE Class-STEADI Fall Prevention October 13 @ 10:00 am - 11:30 am

Did you know that more than one out of four people 65 and older falls each year, and over 3 million are treated in emergency departments annually for fall injuries?

Falls affect us all—whether personally or someone we love or care about. Many of these falls cause injuries, loss of independence, and in some cases, death. However, many falls can be prevented. As a family caregiver, you can help.

Join us for our free Zoom class to discover some simple steps you can take to prevent falls and decrease falls risks.

Registration is required as space is limited.

**To register, contact the
Aging and Disability Resource Center at
360-694-8144 or iaclark@dshs.wa.gov**

Fall Family Caregiver Free ONLINE Class-Dementia Caregiving November 10 @ 10:00 am - 11:30 pm

Caring for someone with dementia?

Join us for some tips related to dementia caregiving. We will talk about what dementia is, ideas on preparing for the road ahead, developing our caregiver tool boxes, communication issues and creating routines.

Register for our free Zoom class and learn how to enhance the day to day care you provide to your loved one.

Registration is required as space is limited.

**To register, contact the
Aging and Disability Resource Center at
360-694-8144 or iaclark@dshs.wa.gov**

Fall Word Search



ACORN
APPLE
AUTUMN
CHESTNUTS
CHILLY
CIDER
COBWEB
FALL
FOOTBALL
GOURD

HALLOWEEN
HARVEST
HAY BALE
HAYRIDE
LEAVES
MAIZE
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