

The Area Agency on Aging & Disabilities of Southwest Washington's Caregiver Corner

Finding Time for Yourself as a Caregiver

Finding time to dedicate to yourself with no outside distractions is challenging enough during the best of times. But when you're a caregiver—especially a “sandwich generation” caregiver who is juggling work tasks with parenting and managing the care of an older loved one—spare time might feel like a myth. The COVID-19 pandemic also blurred the lines between personal time and time spent on outside responsibilities. When everything from work to school to hobbies was happening at home, home no longer felt like a place for peace and relaxation for many. Self-care came secondary to caring for the world at large in the face of a global crisis. And though the situation is continuing to improve, those habits can be hard to break.

Research shows that respite—a period of time taken away from responsibilities dedicated to relaxation and relief—can reduce negative mental health effects like burnout, stress and tiredness. Respite can also give you much needed moments to focus on yourself during times when you're overwhelmed by the needs of others.

Here are just a few ways you find time for yourself as a caregiver:

1. Explore ARCH National Respite Network

The [ARCH National Respite Network](https://www.archrespite.org) and Resource Center ([archrespite.org](https://www.archrespite.org)) was created to help caregivers locate respite and crisis care services. The ARCH Network can help you find more information on Adult Day Centers in your area, as well as care providers that can help support you and your loved one when you need a break.

2. Reclaim relaxation spaces in your home

During the pandemic, many people had to convert rooms in their home to offices, work spaces and school rooms for children attending classes remotely. Places that used to be dedicated to reading, exercise, relaxation, or quiet time became associated with work responsibilities, which often made it hard to use the room for anything else.

If this happened to you, make an effort to reclaim a room you can go to for moments of privacy. Time your use of this room for when children or older loved ones are occupied with other tasks. Whenever you need a moment, go to this room to take a breath, meditate, listen to music, do a quick exercise routine, read a book or work on a personal project. Leave your concerns at the door and enjoy the time you have to yourself while it's yours to have.

3. Recognize that destressing can take simple forms

One barrier many have to taking time for self-care is feeling they have no large chunks of time to give. But relaxation doesn't have to mean a week vacationing in Florida or a three-hour trip to the cinema. Destressing can involve whatever gives you a moment of peace, pulls you away from the source of your exhaustion and reenergizes you. A long vacation can certainly boost your mood, but so can things you can easily work into your everyday life. You can't go to your favorite singer's concert every day, for example, but you can watch performance videos on YouTube and set aside some time to listen to their new music.

If you feel like you can't sacrifice even small windows of time, that is a sign that your current schedule needs to change. No one should be so overburdened that they have no time to spare on their own interests and wellness.

4. Create a backup plan for when you need a break

There may be days when you can't do everything alone, and that's completely understandable. But before those days come, it helps to have a plan in place as to who's going to step up and help you. Build a network of family, friends, and services who you can reach out to when you need to. It can help to break this contact list down by tasks. For example, your loved one's neighbor might be willing to help with errands, while a local transportation service may offer support in helping older adults to medical appointments.

Most importantly, remember that your needs matter, too, and it's not selfish to take care of yourself.

By: Julie Hayes, MS, Content Manager at Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging

Contact the Area Agency on Aging and Disabilities of Southwest Washington at 360-694-8144 or ClarkADRC@dshs.wa.gov to learn more about supports available to family caregivers. Article content is provided by Active Daily Living.