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Caregivers may find that with so many responsibilities self care is placed as a lesser priority than care of a loved one. Yet, staying physically and emotionally strong is key to healthier caregiving. To this end, this column is dedicated to health promotion and personal care for the caregiver.

Caregiver Burnout

Joel Carrier, Guest Columnist, Family Caregiver, Volunteer, AAFGCC

Caregiver burnout. Google it: it's a real condition, at least according to WebMD, AARP, the American Heart Association and numerous other organizations and websites. Even Dr. Oz says so.

The signs are numerous, the symptoms similar to those for anxiety and depression. And if you're feeling the stress, you're not alone.

Whether you're a daughter or son, parent or spouse, sibling, or even a friend, if you're reading this, chances are you're one of more than 15.4 million Americans providing care to someone living with Alzheimer's disease. This means that you are partly responsible for providing 17.5 billion hours of unpaid care valued at \$216 billion, according to the [Alzheimer's Association 2013 Facts and Figures report](#).

That's a big responsibility.

I get it: Caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease can be overwhelming at best and, if you're like many other caregivers, tending to yourself is last on your ever-growing to do list.

But take a moment to think through what would happen to the person for whom you're caring for if you're suddenly not there. What value do you place on your role as caregiver?

A lot, obviously, or you probably wouldn't still be reading.

Self care doesn't have to be overwhelming or involve radical change. Adding more to your already overflowing plate can, in fact, be counterproductive. Instead, try to incorporate a few baby steps into your daily or weekly routine to get yourself started on the road to healthier caregiving.

- *Keep the lines of communication open.* Talk with family and friends - maybe about your challenges or maybe about nothing at all. Just hearing a friendly, supportive voice on the phone can give you enough comfort to help get you through another day. Prefer face-to-face contact? Hook up a webcam on your computer, open a free [Skype account](#) and you're good to go.
- *Join a support group.* Can't get away? There's no shortage of online bulletin boards and chat groups to help pull you through (e.g., [AlzConnected](#)). Remember: baby steps.
- *Rethink productivity.* Stop for a well deserved 20-minute coffee break or quick lunch the next time you're running errands. A few short breaks during a stressful day can pack a powerful punch when it comes to self care.
- *Take advantage of freebies.* Ask family members and friends to cover you for an hour or two on a rotating basis a couple of days a week. Chances are they'll welcome the opportunity to be involved.
- *Consider hiring a caregiver or companion agency to fill in.* Rates vary from agency to agency depending on the level of service provided, and some can be had for as little as \$10 - \$15 per hour.
- *Check out adult day health service.* The respite can be a lifesaver for you the caregiver, and a social lifeline for the person living with Alzheimer's. Contact our local office for more information.
- *Utilize all available resources.* A good starting point is the Caregiver Center on the [Alzheimer's Association website](#) which includes links to Alzheimer's Navigator and Alzheimer's Connected sections.
- If time permits, attend a yoga or tai chi class. Contact our local office for more information.

A few deep breaths throughout the day and a couple of free hours each week could make all the difference in your care giving. And who knows? It might even put a smile on your face.