



CAREGIVERS NETWORK

for East Kootenay Seniors

*"There are only four kinds of people in the world.
Those who have been caregivers.
Those who are currently caregivers.
Those who will be caregivers,
and those who will need a caregiver."*

- Rosalyn Carter



CAREGIVERS SELF-CARE WORKBOOK

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Introduction

No matter what your individual circumstances, caregiving is a huge undertaking that requires many skills – compassion, understanding, knowledge, patience, a good sense of humor and organization. Given that caregiving can be all encompassing it becomes extremely important for caregivers to care for themselves. Although this may sound simple the demands of a loved one can easily take over. As caregivers we tend to focus on the health and safety of our loved one and may put off our own mental well-being and self-care.

Looking after yourself is an important part of living a happy and healthy life. Self-care refers to the activities and practices that we deliberately choose to engage in on a regular basis to maintain and enhance our health and well-being.

In this Caregivers Self-Care Workbook, we describe why self-care matters, why it's important to take time to look after yourself, and how you can build a self-care plan to improve your quality of life.



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CAREGIVING MATTERS

Interesting Facts About Caregivers

- ✓ *More than 8 million Canadians provided informal care to family member or friend.¹*
- ✓ *More than 1 million caregivers are older than 65.²*
- ✓ *44% of caregivers between the ages of 45-64 care for both a parent and children.³*
- ✓ *The number of seniors requiring care is set to double over the next 15 years.⁴*
- ✓ *39% of caregivers look after the needs of their parents, 8% care for a spouse.⁵*
- ✓ *35% of Canada's workforce provides informal, unpaid work while working.⁶*
- ✓ *1.6 million caregivers took time off work to provide care.⁷*
- ✓ *One-in-ten caregivers spend more than 30 hours per week providing care.⁸*
- ✓ *80% of all care given to seniors in the community and 30% of services to seniors in institutions are provided by informal caregivers.⁹*
- ✓ *The economic value of caregivers is astounding: caregivers who look after seniors save Canada's health care system between \$24 to 31 billion annually.¹⁰*

What all these facts demonstrate is that caregiving matters. Caregivers are integral to the health care system and our loved ones well-being. As such, the physical health and emotional state of caregivers is important to nurture and support.

References:

1. Statistics Canada. 2012. "Portrait of Caregivers"
2. Report from the Employer Panel of Caregivers. 2015. "When Work and Caregiving Collide"
3. Ibid
4. Ibid
5. Statistics Canada. 2012. "Portrait of Caregivers"
6. Report from the Employer Panel of Caregivers. 2015. "When Work and Caregiving Collide"
7. Ibid

8. Ibid

9. Carstairs, S. and Keon, WJ. (2009). "Canada's Aging Population: Seizing the Opportunity" (Ottawa, Ont.: Special Senate Committee on Aging)

10. Hollander, M.J., Lui, G., Chappell, N.L., "Who Cares and How Much? The Imputed Economic Contribution to the Canadian Health Care System of Middle-Aged and Older Unpaid Caregivers Providing Care to the Elderly", Healthcare Quarterly 12(2): 42-49. March 2011, < <http://www.longwoods.com/product.php?productid=20660> >



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Why is Self-Care Important?



As a caregiver you know that life is busy. In fact, caring for another person may be the most difficult responsibility you will ever have. While many rewards come with caregiving, there are sacrifices, and demands may be high. In an effort to juggle these demands often times caregivers skip meals, stop exercising, or cancel their social engagements.

When life gets busy, self-care is often the first thing caregivers sacrifice. People often think that taking time for themselves in the middle of busy times seems indulgent, but looking after your well-being will help you be a better caregiver for your loved one.

Self-care is not selfish.

Self-care is important in order to: 1) increase effectiveness, 2) maintain relationships and 3) prevent burnout.

1) Increasing Effectiveness.

The demands of caregiving require energy, and because of this it becomes extremely important to provide your body with the necessary fuel. The fuel for effective caregiving comes from taking time for yourself, eating healthy and comforting food, resting intentionally, and participating in some form of activity. All of the above provide balance in your daily routine and this results in more productivity and resilience to stressors.

2) Maintaining Relationships.

Self-care results in a feeling of mental and physical well being, and this is critical to increased confidence and self-esteem. Caregivers who are confident and have high self-esteem are better equipped to build and maintain the necessary relationships with family, friends, co-workers and others who may be allies or supports in their process of providing care. Practicing self-care demonstrates to people around you that you are setting healthy boundaries, and this not only provides an example for others but shapes their expectations of you.

3) Preventing Burnout.

Caregiving can be stressful and leads to prolonged emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion which can cause burnout. Burnout results in reduced productivity and energy, and sometimes more serious mental or physical concerns. Self-care activities help to rejuvenate you mentally and physically. Activities can be as simple as talking with a friend or family member or going for a walk, anything that gives your mind and/or body time to rest and/or reset.



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Creating a Self-Care Plan

When it comes to self-care, there are many options and things that may work. We all have different needs, strengths, and limitations. The following four step process will help you to create a personal plan that works for you on your caregiving journey.

Step 1: Evaluate Your Coping Skills

Examining your own habits is an important first step in developing a self-care plan. How do you typically deal with life's demands? Can you identify when you need to take a break?

When faced with challenges, we can use either positive coping strategies or negative coping strategies. Below are a few examples of each. Which strategies do you use?

Positive

- Deep breathing
- Stretching
- Meditation
- Listening to music
- Exercising
- Reading
- Going for a walk
- Taking a bath
- Socializing with friends
- Sitting outside and relaxing
- Engaging in a hobby

Negative

- Yelling
- Acting aggressively
- Overeating
- Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol
- Smoking
- Pacing
- Biting your fingernails
- Taking drugs
- Skipping meals
- Withdrawing from family & friends
- Dangerous driving

Be honest when evaluating your current behaviours. If you find yourself drawing more from the negative strategies instead of the positive ones, it may be time to re-evaluate your go-to coping skills.



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Step 2: Identify Your Self-Care Needs as a Caregiver

As caregivers we are faced with unique challenges and no two people have the same self care needs. Think about what you value and need in your everyday life (daily self-care needs) versus what you value and need in the event of a crisis (emergency self care needs). It is important to remember that self care extends far beyond your basic physical needs: consider your psychological, emotional, spiritual, social, financial and workplace well-being.

Daily Self Care

What are you doing to support your overall well-being on a day-to-day basis? Do you engage in self-care practices now? Are you more active in some areas of self-care than others? You can use the table below to help you determine which areas may need more support.

Area of Self-Care	Current Practices	Practices to Try
Physical (e.g. eat regular and healthy meals, good sleep habits, regular exercise, medical check-ups, etc.)		
Emotional (e.g. engage in positive activities, acknowledge my own accomplishments, express emotions in a healthy way, etc.)		
Spiritual (e.g. read inspirational literature, self-reflection, spend time in nature, meditate, explore spiritual connections, etc.)		
Professional (e.g. pursue meaningful work, maintain work-life balance, positive relationships with co-workers, time management skills, etc.)		
Social (e.g. healthy relationships, make time for family/friends, schedule dates with partner/spouse, ask for support from family and friends, etc.)		
Financial (e.g. understand how finances impact your quality of life, create a budget or financial plan, pay off debt, etc.)		
Psychological (e.g. take time for yourself, disconnect from electronic devices, journal, pursue new interests, learn new skills, access life coaching, or counselling support if needed, etc.)		



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Emergency Self Care

As a caregiver, when you are faced with a crisis, you likely won't have time to create a coping strategy. A good practice is to take time to develop a plan in advance so it is there when you need it. Try completing the following table to help identify your unique self care needs during time of distress.

Emergency Self-Care Tools	Helpful (What To Do)	Harmful (What To Avoid)
Relaxation/Staying Calm Which activities help you to relax (e.g. deep breathing, taking a walk)? Which activities make you more agitated or frustrated (e.g. yelling, swearing, or drinking)?		
Self-Talk Helpful self-talk may include, "I am safe/I can do this." Harmful self-talk may include, "I can't handle this/I knew this would happen/I deserve this."		
Social Support Which family members and friends can you reach out to for help or support? Which people should you avoid during times of stress? Be honest about who helps and who zaps your energy.		
Mood Which activities support a positive mood (e.g. listening to uplifting music, enjoying the sunshine)? What should you avoid when times get tough (e.g. staying in bed all day, avoiding social activities)?		
Resilience What, or who, helps you to get through difficult times? What helps you bounce back? Conversely, what or who feeds negativity for you?		



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Step 3: Create Your Self-Care Plan

Once you've determined your personal needs and strategy, write it down. Your self-care plan can be as simple or complex as you need it to be. You may choose to keep a detailed plan at home and carry a simplified version in your wallet, in your purse, or on your phone. Here is an example of how your simplified self-care plan might look:

List your favorite practices for each category:

MY DAILY SELF CARE PLAN					
BODY	MIND	SPIRIT	EMOTIONS	RELATIONSHIPS	WORK

MY TOP THREE POSITIVE COPING STRATEGIES

MY EMERGENCY SELF-CARE PLAN	
HELPFUL <small>List your top 5 emergency self-care practices</small>	HARMFUL <small>List 5 practices, people, places or things to avoid during times of stress.</small>

Now that you've created your self-care plan, look at it regularly. It takes time to form good habits. Make a commitment to yourself and practice your self-care routine as often as possible – you're worth it.



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Ideas: Self Care Activities

Having trouble getting started? Here is a list of helpful hints that may work for you. As each caregiver is unique so are your self care needs. Feel free to try out the following or make up your own ideas about what is helpful to you.

- ✓ ***Join a support group***
- ✓ ***Go for a walk***
- ✓ ***Write in a journal***
- ✓ ***Read a good book***
- ✓ ***Volunteer for a cause meaningful to you***
- ✓ ***Sit in the sun***
- ✓ ***Make a gratitude list of things you are thankful for***
- ✓ ***Take a fresh air break***
- ✓ ***Have a game night with friends***
- ✓ ***Meditate***
- ✓ ***Cuddle with pets***
- ✓ ***Treat yourself to a nice meal***
- ✓ ***Take a nap***
- ✓ ***Listen to music***
- ✓ ***Talk on the phone with a friend***
- ✓ ***Drink lots of water***
- ✓ ***Try a new hobby***
- ✓ ***Have an adventure day***
- ✓ ***Get a massage***
- ✓ ***Buy yourself flowers***
- ✓ ***Practice yoga***
- ✓ ***Turn off electronic devices***
- ✓ ***Have a movie marathon***
- ✓ ***Play a game***
- ✓ ***Dance***
- ✓ ***Wear something that makes you feel confident***
- ✓ ***Browse your local music store or bookstore***
- ✓ ***Work in the garden***
- ✓ ***Get creative: draw, paint, write a song, or cook a new meal***



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Step 4: Create a Backup Plan

Caregiving is challenging and can take its toll on the caregiver. Don't go it alone, try asking for help. While it is not easy to ask for help it can be surprisingly rewarding to have friends and family show you how much they care. Below is a chart to help you build your support network and create a backup plan that is not just solely reliant on you. In time of stress you may forget there is a community of people who are willing to support you so a little preplanning goes a long way to ensuring you have support.

I WILL NEED SOMEONE WHO WILL	NAME	PHONE	EMAIL
Talk with Me as a Trusted Friend	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Go Shopping	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Run Errands	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Drive Me or My Loved One Places	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Do Home Repairs	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Stay With Care Recipient	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Other	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____



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*"It is not the load that breaks you down.
It's the way you carry it."*

— Lena Horne, singer 2016

About the Caregiver Network for East Kootenay Seniors

The Caregivers Network for East Kootenay Seniors recognizes that caring for seniors can be challenging and hard work. Recognizing this challenge, our not-for profit organization strives to provide support for caregivers of seniors with higher complex needs who live in the East Kootenay. The Caregivers Network has been serving and supporting caregivers for over 15 years through our toll free telephone support line, in person support visits, telephone check in's, educational opportunities, and our support groups for caregivers in six of the largest communities throughout the East Kootenay region. The Caregivers Network for East Kootenay Seniors believes that emotional support, information about community resources and help to navigate the system are essential to a caregiver's well-being.

Contact us



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**Healthy
Aging**
by United Way
At home. In community.



**Family Caregivers
of British Columbia**