

Taking Care of You: Caring for the Caregiver

2 credit hour course

Look to yourself first. That may sound rather selfish, but the fact of the matter is that it is true. When you look first to your own health and well-being you will be in much better position to effectively help others. Caring for yourself is one of the most over looked and one of the most important things you, as a professional caregiver, can do. When you are well taken care of, the client that you care for will also greatly benefit.

There has been a great deal of research done on the effects of caregiving on health and well being. Many professional caregivers help take care of their own parents, as well as their clients. On top of this, many are caring for children that are still at home. Statistics have shown caregivers face higher rates of depression, chronic illness, and a possibility in the decline of quality of life.

Despite all of these risks, professional caregivers tend to ignore themselves when it comes to practicing preventative healthcare and self-care behavior. While attending to the needs of clients, caregivers report many problems attending to their own needs such as poor eating habits, sleep deprivation, failure to exercise, failure to rest when ill, and finding no time to see their doctor.

Studies have also shown that caregivers are at increased risk for the abuse of alcohol, tobacco, and anti-depressants. Caregiving can be a very up and down profession. While it can be a very rewarding, it also comes with risks. Continuous demands for care, worry, and exhaustion can be very stressful. Some studies have shown that an estimated 46-59% of professional caregivers are clinically depressed.

It is imperative that a caregiver never forget that he or she will always have clients with conditions such as debilitating injuries, and progressive illnesses of which they cannot stop. There are however many things you can do for your own health and well-being. The better you take care of yourself, the better you can focus on taking care of your client.

[Take a Look at Yourself](#)

Admit it; there are many times that you forget to think about yourself when it comes to your job as a caregiver. Your first thought is always to the care of your client, that's one of the reason's you got into this profession. It is fantastic that you have a caring heart and want to meet the needs of those who cannot do it themselves. The danger lies in not taking care of you in the process, which may become a lifelong habit, and a bad one at that. Taking a hard look at your self is a must. What will happen to your clients if you become ill for a long duration? Tossing out old habits can be a daunting task, the key is finding out why you fail to see to your well being. Here are some questions that you can ask yourself:

- Do you think that you are being selfish when you put your needs first?
- Do you dread the thought of taking care of yourself? Why?
- Do you have trouble seeking help for yourself when you need it?
- How does it make you feel to ask for help? Why?

There are many barriers within you that will do nothing but increase stress and hamper taking good care of yourself. Here are a few examples:

- I am solely responsible for my client's health.
- If I don't care for them, no one will.
- If I do my job well, I will get the attention and respect that I deserve.

"I can never please the client," or "I'm too tired from work to exercise" are prime examples of talking yourself into more stress and anxiety. Try a little positive reinforcement such as telling yourself "My clients are very happy with the care I provide them," or "I will find time to exercise 20 min per day." The more you keep telling yourself these things, the more it will become ingrained in your mind.

Remember, you're only human. It is commonplace for caregivers to continually try to do the impossible, to fix what cannot be fixed. This will only result in feelings of failure and frustration, as well as a tendency to ignore your own needs. Take a good look in the mirror and ask yourself "What can I do to take better care of me?"

[Starting the New You](#)

Once that you have identified any personal habits that have become a barrier for good self-care you can begin to eliminate them, one at a time. The following are effective steps to achieving a happier, healthier you.

Step #1: Lowering Personal Stress

How you look at and react to an event is an important factor in how you adjust and cope with it. The stress that you feel is not only a result of the job that you are performing but also your perception of it, is it positive or negative?

Your levels of stress are influenced by several factors, including:

- You feel as if you were forced to work for the client. You may work for an agency that assigns caregivers to clients. If you had no choice in the client you have you may feel resentment, strain, and distress.

- Your relationship with the care recipient. There may be times when you grow very emotionally attached to your client, wanting to see them healed. If healing does not take place you may become very discouraged and regretful.
- Your ability to cope. How you have coped with stress in the past will indicate how you will cope now. Identify your strengths so you can build on them.
- Your current client situation. Some client conditions are more stressful than others. An example would be caring for a client with dementia as opposed to caring with someone who had a physical ailment.
- Whether you have a good support network.

How to Manage your Stress

1. Recognize early warning signs. These may include irritability, sleep problems, and forgetfulness. Know your own warning signs, acting to make changes. Don't wait until you are overwhelmed.
2. Identify the sources of stress.
3. Identify what you can and cannot change. It is important to remember that you can only change you, not another person. When you try and change things over which you have no control, you only increase your frustration. Recognize what you can change, small changes can make a large impact.
4. Take action. When you take action it gives you a sense of control, helping to reduce stress. Simple activities such as walking, gardening, meditation, meeting a friend for coffee. Decide what works the best for you.

Step #2: Setting Goals

Setting goals for your self are important. Deciding what you would like to accomplish in the next few months is key to taking better care of you. Here are a few goals that you might set:

- Take a break from work. If you are able to take time off for a bit do it. It will allow you time to "recharge your battery".
- Start and maintain an exercise program. Exercising 3 times per week, 30-40 minutes will greatly help improve overall health and mental well being.
- Start eating healthier. Eliminate the fast food, but if you must eat out then grab something like a salad or sandwiches on whole grain bread. Avoid foods high in fat, such as those fries you love so much! Drink water in place of sugar filled sodas.

Goals tend to be too big to do all at once. You will be more likely to reach your goals if you break them down into smaller segments. Make a plan on what step you will take first, and when. No time to lose!

Step#3: Seeking Solutions

Seeking solutions to difficult situations is one of the most important tools in caregiving. When you have identified the problem, taking action to solve it can change the situation and your attitude into a positive one, giving you the confidence in your abilities that you need.

Steps for Seeking Solutions

1. Identify the problem. Look at your situation with an open mind. The key is to getting to the core of the problem, not just what you see on the surface. Tired all the time? Maybe it has to do with you trying to do everything yourself.
2. Make a list of possible solutions. Try to get different perspectives on the situation. Ask a fellow caregiver or talk to your employer.
3. Select one solution from your list and do it.
4. Evaluate. How did your solution work?
5. Try another solution. If the first one did not work, try another!
6. Use other suggestions. Talk to your employer or fellow caregivers and get suggestions from them.
7. If nothing seems to work, accept it and move on. You can always come back to it later.

Step#4: Constructive Communication

Being able to communicate in a constructive manner is one of a caregiver's most important tools. When you are clear, assertive, and constructive, you will be understood and get the help and support you need. Below are some guidelines for good communication.

- Use "I" rather than "you." When you do this you put others at ease and prevent them from becoming defensive in certain situations. This way you don't come across as laying blame.
- Respect the rights and feelings of others. Watch what you say, recognize the other person has a right to express their feelings.
- Be clear and specific. Speak directly to the person. Don't just hope they understand or guess at what you mean. Speaking directly to them shows you respect their opinion.
- Be a good listener. The key to strong communication is the ability to listen.

Step#5: Asking and Accepting Help

Have you been in a situation where someone asked if they could assist you and you told them you were fine, you could do it on your own? You may not want to admit that you cannot do it all yourself.

Have a mental list of the way that others could help. If you are feeling overwhelmed in your work and it is spilling over into your personal life, do not be ashamed to ask family and friends for help. Have a neighbor or friends walk your dog if you're single, ask your wife or husband to pick up the dry cleaning, etc. People want to help; it's up to you to tell them how.

Asking for Help

- Consider the person's special abilities and interests. Whether you need a family member to help out around the house or run errands for you, or if you need a friend to do something, consider what people are good at and what they don't mind doing.
- Resist asking the same person to do things. Just because they can't say no does not mean they don't get burned out.
- Pick the best time to make a request. A person might be stressed out and tired. Wait for a better time.
- Be prepared for no. Try not to take it personally when a person turns you down. They have lives to live as well.
- Don't be weak in your request. Come right out and tell a person what you need, don't beat around the bush.

Step#6: Talk to Your Doctor

No matter what your level of training in the caregiving field, you will always need to seek out the advice of the RN overseeing the case or perhaps the doctor of your client. While you are open about talking about your clients care with the proper medical personnel, you may not be as open when it comes to talking to your own doctor. As has been already stated, seeing to your own personal care is just as important as the needs of your client. Seeing your doctor on a regular basis is a must.

Tips on speaking with Your Doctor

- Know your questions beforehand. Know what you want to ask your doctor before you go in to see them. Be specific.
- Ask the case RN. You may have a nurse in charge of your client's case just a phone call away. If you have some questions about your own health they may offer good advice.

- Make sure your appointment meets your needs. Make sure to schedule at a time that works best for you. Make sure you have enough time that the doctor can properly address your issues and questions.
- Call ahead. Before you head to their office, call and make sure your doctor is on schedule.
- Take someone with you. Whether it is a friend or loved one, take someone with you who can ask the tough questions you may not be able or willing to ask.
- Use assertive communication. Remember the “I” and “me” discussion? This would be a good place to apply that knowledge.

Step#7: Begin a Exercise Regimen

The mere thought of exercising may make you tired. The fact of the matter is that by having an exercise routine you'll find you are no longer so worn out and you'll feel a lot better. If you're not quite ready to run a marathon, don't lose heart. Studies show that things such as walking, gardening, and household chores can improve your health. The key is to increase your physical activity by exercising and using your own muscle power.

Exercise will help you to sleep better, reduce stress and tension, and increase energy and alertness. If finding time to exercise is a problem, incorporate it into your daily activities. If you need to, spread it out during the day into short periods. Walking is one of the best things that you can do. Walking 30-40 minutes, 3 times a week is very beneficial.

Step#8: Learn from Your Emotions

A sign of strength is when you can recognize that your emotions are controlling you instead of you controlling them. You need to pay attention to what your emotions are telling you, they are there for a reason. They are useful for understand just how we are doing.

Being a caregiver often involves a wide range of emotions. Some feelings can be more comfortable than others. When you find that your emotions are intense, they could mean the following:

- You need to make a change in your work situation.
- You are grieving the loss of a client or loved one.
- Your stress levels have increased.
- You need to be assertive and ask for what you need.

In Summary

It is important to remember that it is not selfish to focus on your own needs and desires when you are a caregiver, its part of the job. You are responsible for caring for you. Follow these self-care practices:

- Learn stress reduction techniques.
- Attend to your own healthcare needs.
- Get proper rest and nutrition.
- Exercise on a regular basis.
- Take time off from work without feeling guilty.
- Participate in fun activities. Live a little!
- Seek and accept the support of others.
- Seek the council of a friend or colleague when you need it.
- Identify and acknowledge your feelings.
- Don't look at things so negative. Find the positives.
- Set goals for yourself.

Test Questions

1. Studies show that 46-____% of caregivers are clinically depressed.
 - A. 50
 - B. 55
 - C. 59
 - D. 60

2. The better you take care of _____ the better you can take care of your client.
 - A. Pets
 - B. Family
 - C. The household
 - D. Yourself

3. Positive _____ is a key element to helping reduce stress in your life.
 - A. Reinforcement
 - B. Effects
 - C. Regard
 - D. Ratings

4. Three factors that might contribute to your levels of stress as a caregiver include the following except:
 - A. You feel you were forced to work for the client.
 - B. Your ability to cope.
 - C. Whether you have a good support network.
 - D. Always getting assistance when requested.

5. All these things help manage your stress except:
 - A. Having an alcoholic drink
 - B. Identify the problem
 - C. Take action
 - D. Recognize early warning signs

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6. Setting _____ for yourself are important.
- A. Standards
 - B. Goals
 - C. Appointments
 - D. Examples
7. Name an example of one goal that you might set for yourself to relieve stress.
- A. Take a break from work
 - B. Confront the client
 - C. Start and maintain an exercise program
 - D. Eat healthier
8. All these are steps for seeking solutions except:
- A. Give up
 - B. Identify the problem
 - C. Make a list of possible solutions
 - D. Evaluate
9. Being able to communicate in a _____ manner is one of your most important tools as a caregiver.
- A. Constructive
 - B. Quiet
 - C. Humble
 - D. Aggressive
10. Describe one guideline for constructive communication.
- A. Be clear and specific
 - B. Be a good listener
 - C. Use "I" rather than "you".
 - D. Be vocal to get your point across.
11. These are all things to consider when asking for help except:
- A. Resist asking the same person to do things.
 - B. Never take no for an answer.

- C. Pick the best time to make a request.
 - D. Don't be weak in your request.
12. All of these are tips for speaking with your doctor except:
- A. Go alone.
 - B. Use assertive communication.
 - C. Call ahead.
 - D. Know your questions beforehand.
13. Exercising at least ___ days a week, 30-40 min per day is greatly beneficial to your health.
- A. 2
 - B. 3
 - C. 4
 - D. 5
14. When your emotions are intense, name one thing they could mean.
- A. You need to be assertive.
 - B. You need to distance yourself from family and friends.
 - C. Your stress levels have increased.
 - D. You need to change your work situation.
15. Learning stress _____ techniques are paramount to being a good caregiver.
- A. Induction
 - B. Reduction
 - C. Analyzing
 - D. Test
16. Make sure to get proper rest and _____.
- A. Entertainment
 - B. Excitement
 - C. Nutrition
 - D. Encouragement
17. Seek and accept the _____ of others.
- A. Support

- B.** Monetary help
- C.** Acceptance
- D.** Affirmation

18. Identify and _____ your feelings.

- A.** Control
- B.** Hide
- C.** Acknowledge
- D.** Change

19. _____ should be done on a regular basis.

- A.** Exercise
- B.** Therapy
- C.** Anger management
- D.** Isolation from others

20. Don't look at things so _____. Find the _____.

- A.** Bad, good
- B.** Bleak, excitement
- C.** Negative, positive
- D.** Absolute, solution

How to Apply for Course Credit:

Please fill out the information below and mail it in with your test answers and payment of **\$10** to:

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