

# Caregiver Support Toolkit

## Caring for Others While Caring for Yourself

Being a caregiver can be meaningful, rewarding, and sometimes overwhelming. Many caregivers support a spouse, parent, family member, friend, or neighbour with daily activities, health concerns, appointments, emotional support, or safety needs. This guide provides simple information, practical tips, and helpful tools to support you in your caregiving journey.

- ✔ **Remember:** You do not have to do this alone. You matter too — looking after your own well-being helps you continue caring for others.

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# What Is Caregiving?

Caregiving means helping another person with everyday needs, health concerns, or emotional support. It looks different for everyone — some caregivers provide occasional support, while others are involved every single day. No matter the level of involvement, the role you play in someone's life is deeply meaningful and genuinely important.

Caregiving can include many different kinds of tasks. Whether you help with one or several of the following, you are making a real difference in someone's quality of life.



## Appointments & Transportation

Scheduling and accompanying to medical visits, errands, and community activities.



## Meals & Household Tasks

Preparing nutritious food, grocery shopping, cleaning, and maintaining a safe home environment.



## Medication Reminders

Helping manage prescriptions, refills, and keeping track of dosage schedules.



## Emotional Support

Providing companionship, listening, and offering comfort during difficult moments.



## Finances & Paperwork

Helping manage bills, insurance, and important documents or appointments.



## Personal Care & Daily Routines

Assisting with bathing, dressing, mobility, and other daily living activities.

# Signs of Caregiver Stress

Caregiving can affect your emotional, physical, and mental well-being — often in ways that sneak up on you gradually. It is easy to put your own needs last when you are focused on someone else. Recognizing the early warning signs of stress is one of the most important things you can do for yourself and for the person you care for.

Caregiver stress is very common. It is not a sign of weakness or failure — it is a natural response to the demands of a challenging and important role. Asking for help is a strength, not a burden.

## Emotional Signs

- Feeling overwhelmed or exhausted
- Feeling anxious, frustrated, or sad
- Feeling guilty for needing a break

## Physical Signs

- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Forgetting your own appointments
- Neglecting your nutrition or hydration

## Social Signs

- Pulling away from friends or activities
- Feeling isolated or misunderstood
- Losing interest in things you once enjoyed

**i** **Caregiver stress is common. Asking for help is a strength.** If you recognize several of these signs in yourself, it may be time to reach out for additional support.

# Taking Care of Yourself

You cannot pour from an empty cup. One of the most important things you can do as a caregiver is to protect your own health and well-being. When you take care of yourself, you are better able to show up for the person who depends on you — and that matters deeply.

Self-care does not have to mean big changes or a lot of extra time. Even small, consistent habits can make a meaningful difference in how you feel day to day. Start with one or two of the tips below and build from there at your own pace.

## Take Breaks

Even short breaks during the day can restore your energy. Step outside, breathe fresh air, or sit quietly for a few minutes.

## Accept Help

When someone offers to help, say yes. Let friends, family, or community services share some of the load with you.

## Stay Connected

Keep in touch with people you trust — a quick phone call or visit with a friend can ease feelings of isolation.

## Keep Your Appointments

Your medical and personal needs matter. Do not skip your own health appointments because you are too busy caring for someone else.

## Eat & Hydrate

Regular meals and staying hydrated have a direct impact on your mood, energy, and ability to cope with daily demands.

## Be Kind to Yourself

Caregiving is hard work. Treat yourself with the same compassion you give to others — you deserve it too.

"You cannot pour from an empty cup. Take care of yourself first."

# Setting Healthy Boundaries

Boundaries are not walls — they are a healthy and necessary part of sustainable caregiving. Setting limits on what you can do, and when, does not mean you care any less. It means you are being realistic about your capacity and honest about your needs, which ultimately protects both you and the person you support.

Many caregivers feel guilty when they say no or step back, but guilt is not a reliable guide. Learning to set and hold gentle boundaries is one of the kindest things you can do for your long-term ability to provide care. You do not have to do everything alone, and you were never meant to.

## It Is Okay to Say No

Declining a request or a task does not make you a bad caregiver. Knowing your limits is a sign of wisdom.

## It Is Okay to Ask for Help


Reaching out to family, friends, or community services is a practical and courageous step — not a sign of failure.

## It Is Okay to Rest

Rest is not a luxury — it is a basic human need. Protecting your sleep and downtime is essential to your health.

## It Is Okay to Change Plans

Life changes. Adjusting your caregiving schedule or approach when circumstances shift is flexible, not irresponsible.

 **Reminder:** You do not have to do everything alone. Setting healthy boundaries protects both your well-being and your ability to care for others over the long term.

# Helpful Questions to Ask Yourself

Sometimes the busiest caregivers are the least likely to stop and check in with themselves. These simple questions can serve as gentle prompts to pause, reflect, and tune in to what you are actually experiencing. Try asking yourself these questions regularly — once a week, or whenever you feel like you are running on empty.

There are no right or wrong answers. These questions are simply invitations to be honest with yourself about how you are doing and what kind of support might help right now. Your answers may shift from week to week, and that is completely normal.

1

## Am I feeling overwhelmed?

Check in with your stress level honestly. It is okay if the answer is yes — that is useful information, not a weakness.

2

## Have I taken time for myself recently?

Think back over the past few days. Have you done anything just for yourself, even something small?

3

## What kind of support would help right now?

Try to name it specifically — practical help, emotional support, a break, or someone to talk to.

4

## Who can I ask for help?

Think of one person — a family member, friend, neighbor, or service provider — you could reach out to today.

If you find that your answers reveal ongoing stress or isolation, consider reaching out to a caregiver support program, your family doctor, or a trusted person in your life. You deserve support too.

# Building Your Support Circle

Having a support circle — even a small one — can make a significant difference in your caregiving experience. Knowing who you can call in a difficult moment, who can step in when you need a break, and where to turn for professional help gives you a foundation of security and confidence.

Use the spaces below to write down the people and services that are part of your support network. Keep this information somewhere easy to find, and share it with others who might be involved in care decisions. Updating it regularly ensures you always have current contacts on hand.

Person / Service	Phone Number
Family Member or Friend: _____	Phone: _____
Backup Support Person: _____	Phone: _____
Doctor / Health Provider: _____	Phone: _____
Caregiver Support Program: _____	Phone: _____
Community Support Services: _____	Phone: _____

✔ **Tip:** Even having one or two people in your support circle is a great start. You do not need a large network — you just need people you can trust and reach when you need them most.

# My Caregiving Plan: Recognizing When I Need Support

Having a personal caregiving plan helps you identify early warning signs, respond with self-compassion, and reach out before you reach a breaking point. This section is for you — a private, practical space to reflect on what stress looks and feels like for you specifically, so you can act on it sooner.

Everyone's warning signs are different. Some people feel it in their body first — tight shoulders, headaches, or poor sleep. Others notice changes in their emotions or behavior. Take a moment to think about what happens to you personally when you are getting close to your limit.

## Signs I need help (write your own below):

### Physical Signs

Examples: Headaches, fatigue, poor sleep, loss of appetite.

My signs:

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### Emotional Signs

Examples: Feeling tearful, irritable, anxious, or hopeless.

My signs:

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### Behavioral Signs

Examples: Withdrawing from others, missing appointments, losing interest in activities.

My signs:

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Once you recognize your own warning signs, you can use them as a cue to reach out for support, take a break, or use one of the coping strategies that works best for you. Awareness is the first and most powerful step.

# My Caregiving Plan: Continued

Your caregiving plan is a living document — something you can revisit and update as your situation changes. This page is a space to continue building your personal plan. Think of it as a tool that belongs entirely to you, designed to help you navigate difficult moments with a little more ease and clarity.

As you fill in this section, be honest and specific. The more clearly you can name your needs and strategies, the easier it will be to use this plan when you actually need it. You deserve to have a plan that supports you, just as much as the person you care for deserves a plan that supports them.

**i** **My Caregiving Plan Notes:** Use this space to jot down anything important about your caregiving role, your needs, or your goals for taking better care of yourself.

## What I Find Most Challenging

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## What Has Helped Me in the Past

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## What I Would Like More Help With

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# Things That Help Me Feel Better

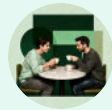
Knowing what restores your energy, lifts your mood, or brings you a sense of calm is incredibly valuable as a caregiver. These are not indulgences — they are your personal toolkit for resilience. When you can identify what genuinely helps, you can turn to those strategies intentionally rather than waiting until you are completely depleted.

Below are some common examples that caregivers find helpful. Feel free to use these as inspiration, and add your own in the spaces provided. Your list will be unique to you, and that is exactly as it should be.



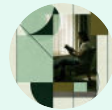
## Gentle Movement

A short walk, gentle stretching, or light exercise can shift your mood and ease physical tension. Even 10 minutes makes a difference.



## Connection With Others

Talking to a trusted friend, family member, or fellow caregiver can ease feelings of isolation and remind you that you are not alone.



## Quiet Time

Reading, sitting in a quiet space, listening to music, or simply resting without demands can help you recharge your mental reserves.



## A Hobby or Creative Outlet

Gardening, crafting, cooking something you enjoy, or any activity that gives you pleasure deserves a regular place in your week.

My personal list — Things that help me feel better: \_\_\_\_\_

# More Strategies for Well-Being

Beyond the basics of rest and connection, there are many small practices that caregivers find sustaining over the long term. You do not have to try everything at once — pick one or two that feel accessible to you right now and experiment with them. Building a diverse set of coping strategies over time makes you more resilient when difficult moments arise.

Remember, these strategies are not about being perfect or doing everything right. They are simply gentle tools you can reach for when you need them. Some days will be harder than others, and that is okay.

1

## Breathe

Slow, deep breathing for just two minutes can activate your body's relaxation response and reduce feelings of overwhelm.

2

## Rest

Prioritize sleep and allow yourself to rest without guilt. Sleep deprivation magnifies stress and reduces your ability to cope.

3

## Reflect

Take a few moments each day to notice what went well, however small. Gratitude and reflection can shift your perspective.

4

## Reach Out

Contact a support program, a health provider, or a friend. Asking for help is one of the most effective strategies available to you.

# People I Can Contact

When you are struggling, having a clear and ready list of people to contact can make it much easier to actually reach out. Many caregivers say that in their most difficult moments, they simply did not know who to call or felt unsure about burdening others. This page is designed to remove that barrier.

Think about different types of support — emotional, practical, professional — and identify at least one person or resource for each. Having a variety of contacts means you can match the right support to the right need, which makes your outreach more effective and less overwhelming.



## Emotional Support

Someone to talk to when you are feeling low, stressed, or just need to be heard.

Name & Phone: \_\_\_\_\_



## Practical Help

Someone who can step in with errands, meals, transportation, or a few hours of relief care.

Name & Phone: \_\_\_\_\_



## Health & Professional Support

Your family doctor, a nurse practitioner, or a caregiver support coordinator who can provide guidance.


Name & Phone: \_\_\_\_\_



## Community Services

A local seniors' centre, home care program, or 211 service that can connect you with additional resources.

Name & Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

 If you are ever unsure where to turn, call **211** — Canada's community and social services helpline. They can connect you with local supports in your area.

# Your Caregiving Plan: Bringing It Together

You have worked through several important parts of your caregiving plan — recognizing signs of stress, identifying what helps you feel better, building your support circle, and naming people you can call. This section brings those pieces together into a simple, personal reference you can return to whenever you need it.

A good caregiving plan does not need to be long or complicated. It just needs to be yours — honest, practical, and rooted in what you actually need. Keep this somewhere accessible so that on the difficult days, you do not have to start from scratch. You will already have a map.

01

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## Notice Your Warning Signs

When you feel overwhelmed, tired, or withdrawn — pause and name what is happening. Awareness is the first step.

03

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## Reach Out to Someone

Contact one person from your support circle — for practical help, emotional support, or professional guidance.

02

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## Use a Coping Strategy

Go to your personal list of things that help you feel better — a walk, a quiet moment, a phone call, or a rest.

04

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## Access a Community Resource

If you need more support, connect with a caregiver program, your health provider, or 211 for local services.

# Ways I Can Take Care of Myself This Week

Small, intentional acts of self-care can have a big impact over time — especially when practiced consistently. The checklist below is not a test or a to-do list. It is a gentle reminder of options that are available to you this week. Choose the ones that feel right for where you are right now.

You do not need to check everything off. Even one meaningful act of self-care each day is a step in the right direction. The goal is not perfection — it is simply showing up for yourself with the same care and intention you bring to showing up for others.

## This Week, I Will Try To:

- Go for a walk
- Call a friend
- Rest without guilt
- Attend an activity I enjoy
- Ask for help with something
- Keep my own appointment
- Eat a nourishing meal
- Spend 10 minutes doing something just for me

## My Own Self-Care Goals This Week

Write in your own ideas below:

- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

At the end of the week, reflect on what you tried. What felt good? What will you carry into next week?

Reflection: \_\_\_\_\_

- ✔ **Remember:** Even one small step toward caring for yourself this week is a meaningful act. You deserve support, rest, and kindness too.

# Helpful Resources

You do not need to navigate caregiving alone. There are people and organizations in your community who are there specifically to help caregivers like you. Whether you need practical support, a listening ear, information about available services, or guidance in a difficult moment, these contacts are a good place to start.

Fill in the local phone numbers that apply to your area and keep this page somewhere handy — on your fridge, in your phone, or tucked into this guide. Knowing where to turn before you need help makes it much easier to reach out when the moment comes.

## Local Seniors' Centre / SALC

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Your local seniors' centre offers programs, peer support, and connections to community resources.

## Home & Community Care Services

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Provides in-home support including personal care, nursing, and therapy services for seniors and caregivers.

## Caregiver Support Services

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Dedicated support for caregivers — counseling, respite planning, education, and peer connections.

## Family Doctor / Health Provider

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Your health provider can support both you and the person you care for. Do not delay your own care.

## 211 — Community & Social Services

Dial **211** to be connected with community and social services in your area. Available in many regions across the U.S. and Canada.

## Emergency Services

Dial **911** for any emergency situation involving immediate risk to health or safety.

# A Final Reminder

"Caregiving can be challenging, and you deserve support too. You are doing important work. Small steps, small breaks, and asking for help all matter."

Every day that you show up for someone you love — through the difficult moments, the exhausting routines, and the quiet acts of care — is a profound act of dedication. It is not always easy. It does not always feel like enough. But it matters more than you may know, both to the person you are caring for and to the community around you.

You are allowed to have hard days. You are allowed to feel overwhelmed, tired, or uncertain. Those feelings are real and valid. What matters is that you do not carry them alone. Reach out to your support circle. Use the resources on the previous page. Take one small step toward caring for yourself today — whether that means resting, asking for help, or simply being kind to yourself in how you speak about your own efforts.

## You Are Not Alone

There are people and services who want to support you. You do not have to figure everything out by yourself.

## Small Steps Matter

You do not have to make big changes all at once. One small act of self-care, one phone call, one honest conversation — it all counts.

## You Deserve Care Too

The compassion you give to others belongs to you as well. Being a caregiver does not mean putting yourself last — it means making room for everyone, including yourself.

✔ **Thank you for all that you do.** Your care, your patience, and your presence make a real difference. Take good care of yourself — you matter.