

# *Journeys 2*

## *A Newsletter for Caregivers*

### **10 Soul-Healing Tips to Help Prevent Caregiver Burnout**

Patricia McMorro Apr 18, 2018



What would happen to a car that, day in and day out, simply never stopped running? Easy: it'd break down. This is what happens to caregivers when they don't stop and take care of themselves.

A certain amount of stress is normal, especially when providing consistent care. But when you're plagued by constant exhaustion, disinterest in activities you used to love or feel like you have absolutely nothing left to give, you may be experiencing caregiver burnout.

In this article, we lay out the symptoms and causes of this serious condition and provide healing tips to avoid burning out.

#### **What is Caregiver Burnout?**

Caregiver burnout is the significant physical, mental and emotional fatigue one experiences when providing long-term care for another. This can be confused with caregiver stress, a condition which is still cause for concern, but often is the precursor to the more severe caregiver burnout syndrome. Caregiver burnout can also be confused with compassion fatigue, though the two differ.

#### **Caregiver Burnout Vs Compassion Fatigue: What's the Difference?**

While caregiver burnout is specific to caregivers, compassion fatigue is more general and is characterized by feeling overwhelmed by the suffering of others. In the past, compassion fatigue was an issue that commonly plagued health care professionals. People who work in the medical field frequently see or hear about tragedies most of us don't want to even imagine. However, due to the Internet and smartphones, we now have instant access to all kinds of suffering. We can scroll through tragic news stories, videos, social media posts... the list goes on.

Signs of compassion fatigue include feeling hopeless, increased complaining and feeling excessively burdened by the suffering of others.

#### **Symptoms of Caregiver Burnout**

Some of the signs of caregiver burnout are similar to compassion fatigue and caregiver stress. However, there are serious symptoms that specifically suggest you've been burned out:

##### **Physical symptoms:**

- Rapid change in weight or appetite
- Body aches
- Migraines or persistent headaches
- Getting sick more often and for longer
- Exhaustion you can't shake, regardless of sleep

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### Emotional symptoms:

- Feeling hopeless, like your stress will never end
- Depression
- Anxiety/Panic attacks
- Feeling betrayed or alone
- Isolating yourself
- Low self-esteem, worthlessness

### Causes of Caregiver Burnout

Burnout can be traced back to many sources. However, three common causes of caregiver burnout include: the burden of the actual caregiving tasks, self-inflicted pressure, and lack of adequate rest.

Caregivers do so much more than the name implies. Not only do they offer emotional support for their loved ones, but they also typically engage in burdensome tasks that can heap on the stress. According to caregiver demographics from the Family Caregiver Alliance, those who provide support for a loved one spend shocking amounts of time on these tasks.

In an average month, caregivers spend this much time assisting their loved one:

- **13 days** shopping, preparing meals, cleaning the house, driving, and giving medication
- **6 days** feeding, dressing, grooming, walking, bathing, and assistance toileting
- **13 hours** researching care services and disease information, coordinating doctors' appointments, and managing finances

Another cause of burnout is pressure. Pressure comes at care providers from all sides, whether it be from family members or the care receiver. However, the main source of this tension actually comes from the caregivers themselves. Roughly half of caregivers' report feeling like they don't have a choice about performing clinical duties and that this feeling is self-inflicted. They feel like caregiving is a personal responsibility because no one else can do it or because financial constraints prevent them from getting professional assistance.

Finally, when caregivers forego the physical and mental care they need *themselves*, burnout is basically inevitable. This can look like consistently getting less than 7-8 hours of sleep, having trouble finding time to eat regular meals and spending little to no time on vacation, with friends or partaking in hobbies. It's an unfortunate statistic that unpaid caregivers report positive activities in their respective daily lives have been reduced 27.2% due to their responsibilities.

### Tips to Avoid and Recover from Caregiver Burnout?

Even if you feel like you'll never get back your energy, don't worry. We offer healing advice from actual care providers and other leaders in self-care to help you get your spark back. Here are 10 inspiring tips to help prevent caregiver burnout.

#### 1. Rally your community for support

You'd be surprised how much support you can get just by asking for it. Don't downplay what you're going through or worry about being a burden on others. Ask your neighbors, coworkers, friends, and family for the help you need. In most cases, they'll gladly go above and beyond your call for aid!

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“Just recently my husband at 47 had triple bypass surgery. I had constant help from my circle of friends, neighbors, community, family, and church. I had meals brought in for 3 weeks, my mother-in-law stayed with me for 8 weeks, neighbors called and helped with rides for my boys, sisters from church send me cards, messages to uplift our soul. My attitude was wonderful. I had a phrase that I constantly repeated: *Smile and wave*. It helped a lot.”

### 2. Check in with yourself every single day

The irony of caregiving is that the person giving so much to others frequently forgets to give themselves the same treatment. Try taking a few minutes of alone time each night and asking yourself these 6 questions:

1. Did I get 7-8 hours of sleep last night?
2. Did I eat 3 meals and a snack today?
3. Did I drink 8 glasses of water today?
4. Did I get any exercise today?
5. Did I spend time on an activity I enjoy today?
6. Did I spend time with someone other than the person I care for?

If the answer to more than one of these questions is no, it's time to reevaluate your daily schedule. Sleep, proper nutrition, and hobbies are all human necessities, and you deserve them just as much as anyone else. It's time to make time for you.

### 3. Give yourself some appreciation

A recent caregiver appreciation study found that caregivers who feel more appreciated experience greater emotional wellbeing. Sometimes, due to illnesses or disabilities, the loved one's caregivers provide for cannot adequately show appreciation for all their help. A lack of appreciation is discouraging for caregivers and can easily fester into resentment.

Fortunately, there are a few helpful tactics you can try to get the recognition you deserve:

- Join an online support group to hear kind words.
- Don't forget to give yourself a pat on the back. Treat yourself to a massage, a nice meal, or a new pair of shoes at the end of a hard week.
- If you feel comfortable, try asking a good friend, family member or partner to send you a thank you note once a month. Though the message may not be from the care receiver, it can feel really good to receive recognition and gratitude from those around you.
- Finally, **if** appreciation is something your care receiver can feasibly work on, consider talking to them gently about how good it would make you feel to hear them share the occasional word of gratitude.

### 4. Practice forgiveness and gratitude

Caregivers are tough cookies, but there's no such thing as perfection. Perfectionism, blame, and self-loathing all contribute to caregiver burnout. Focusing on self-forgiveness, and also forgiving those around you, is incredibly healing. For inspiration, try this creative forgiveness prompt to help you write, paint, or speak your story and achieve peace.

And don't forget to take time to step out of your daily routine to reflect on what you're grateful for, whether it be big or small. You can be thankful for the help being offered by others, for the beautiful weather or for yourself. You'll feel the pressure begin to lift as you practice being grateful each day.

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### 5. Learn to accept help from others

You can do this. But you can't do this alone. Caregivers often bring stress upon themselves simply because they won't allow others to pitch in. Listen to these caregivers below who found the help of others to be critical in avoiding burnout:

"Learn to accept help. If you can afford to hire to clean your home once a month or to plow your driveway, do it. Walk. See your friends for a meal periodically. A massage. Eat healthy. Get rest. Only do the necessities. Make meals in bulk and freeze them. Turn off negativity such as the news. Don't let toxic people into your life. Pray."

"Accept help from others! There are so many that want to help. You can't possibly do it all by yourself. Even if it is the littlest thing!"

### 6. Cultivate hobbies as an outlet for stress

You may spend a significant portion of your time providing care, but it's important to remember that your identity is so much more than that. Be intentional about keeping your interests alive so you can channel the strain of being a caregiver in a positive way and get back to being yourself.

"Allow yourself to be defined as anything but a caregiver, if you spend an inordinate amount of time giving care...cultivate hobbies as ways to be known, so that others know what to talk about other than the caretaking you do (they probably secretly admire you and may want to focus on that aspect of who you are)."

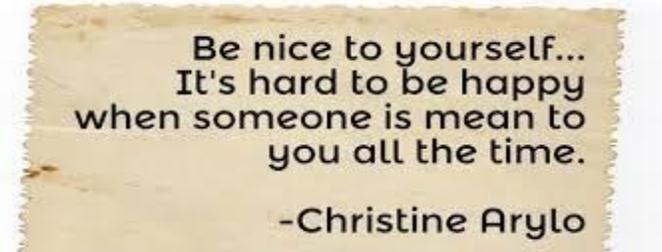
"I have made myself return to teaching/participating in martial arts, albeit in short duration's, but it's the break I need."

"Spend one hour alone each day. Not running errands or doing chores. Spend your time alone in a quiet place to decompress, to pray to relive good memories. Spend one hour for you."

### 7. Get organized

What feels more chaotic than disorganization? Not much. Introducing structure and order into your life is a great defense against stressors and gives you back control. When everything is in its place, that's one less thing to worry about. For caregivers, this could look like:

- Organizing all medical files into a designated folder for easy access.
- Keeping a color-coded daily planner.
- Making sure your vehicle is cleaned regularly.
- Rearranging your closet, pantry and bathrooms so you never have to frantically search for that favorite



Be nice to yourself...  
It's hard to be happy  
when someone is mean to  
you all the time.

-Christine Arylo

[www.quoteslyfe.com](http://www.quoteslyfe.com)

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### Nutrition and Mealtimes for Older Adults: Caregivers Tips

Monica Storey, MS RD, Bridgeland Seniors Health, AHS



A good diet is important for keeping our bodies healthy and preventing or healing from illness and surgery. Nutrition needs change as we age. Many factors can get in the way of eating well. There are some tips on nutrition for seniors, practical meal preparation ideas, and helpful mealtime strategies.

**Nutrition.** As we age, we need a diet high in:

*Protein:* eggs, beans, lentils, fish, chicken, meat, dairy products

*Calcium:* milk, yogurt, cheese, fortified plant-based beverages, beans

*Vitamin D:* fortified foods, and a supplement of 800-2000 IU.

A balanced diet should also include whole grains, and vegetables and fruits every day.

**Unintended Weight Loss** can increase your risk of falls. Poor nutrition can be caused by a poor appetite, constipation, loose fitting dentures, swallowing problems, and mobility issues. If you see your loved one losing weight or eating poorly, contact your doctor. Ask for a referral to a registered dietitian.

#### Meal Preparation

**Shifting roles:** Meal preparation can be hard for many reasons. Your loved one can no longer shop and prepare meals. Or the person with dementia cannot safely prepare meals. A few tips to make meal preparation easier:

- Plan meals for at least a few days and make a grocery list.
- Order groceries on-line or by phone. Ask for help of family, neighbors or volunteers through seniors' agencies.
- Plan to cook enough for extras for the next day or freeze extra portions for later.
- Include some no-cook meals, such as:
  - Lentil, beans, peas, or chunky chicken or meat soup with buttered multigrain bun, Greek yogurt
  - Whole grain sandwiches with cheese slices, ham, cherry tomatoes, banana
  - Cottage cheese and canned or fresh fruit, bran muffin
  - Baked beans on toast, with grated cheese, applesauce
- Try meal delivery services such as Meals on Wheels or commercial services. They offer balanced meals, at a reasonable price. The meals are delivered frozen for convenient reheating as needed. Keep a few meals in the freezer as back up for busy days or order for all of your dinner meals.

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### Mealtime

Mealtime is an opportunity to share and connect with loved ones. Dining with others can give your loved ones something to look forward to and reduce isolation. However, sometime mealtimes can be challenging due to poor coordination or disruptive behaviours. When eating becomes difficult, a person may lose weight and be at risk for undernutrition.

### Positive Mealtime Tips

- Make mealtimes as pleasant as possible. Encourage your loved one to eat, but do not cajole.
- Keep in mind personal preferences when planning and preparing foods. Often traditional foods eaten when younger remain the best accepted foods for seniors.
- Cut down on distractions. Turn off tv, radio, other screens so that your loved one can focus on eating.
- For small appetites, use smaller plates. Offer smaller, more frequent meals i.e., 3 meals and 2-3 snacks. Offer high calorie, higher protein foods.
- When eating skills are a problem, offer finger foods, such as cut up fruit and vegetables, sandwiches, fish sticks, cheese slices or cubes, muffins, pancakes, or waffles.
- Sometimes dental problems or a dry mouth can make eating a chore. Offer softer, easy to chew foods, such as ground meat-based meals with sauces or gravy, breaded fish, egg dishes, healthy soups, puddings and yogurt, canned fruit, applesauce.
- Offer and encourage fluids to prevent dehydration. Older adults need at least 6-8 cups of fluid per day. Offer sips of water through the day- it can be flavored with lemon, orange, or cucumber slices for variety of flavor.

### Tips for those with Dementia

- People with memory problems may not remember to eat or may forget that they have finished eating a meal. Having regular mealtimes and sitting down together with others will help to cue for eating.
- Someone with dementia may not know what they want to eat. If giving meal choices, offer only two things at a time. Keep choices simple.
- Don't rush the meal. Instead encourage, and model eating. Cue with words and action.

Take time to relax and enjoy your meal together!

### Mini Frittatas (12 muffins)

2 tsp olive oil	1/8 tsp garlic
2 c. Zucchini, finely diced	4 slices ham, diced
1 c. red onion, finely diced	¾ c shredded mozzarella cheese
1 c red pepper, finely diced	8 eggs
2 tsp Dried basil	½ c whole milk
1/2 tsp oregano	

1. Heat oil. Add vegetables. Cook, stirring often, until vegetables are softened. Add in herbs and seasonings.
2. Grease muffin pans. Line bottom of each cup with ham, then softened vegetables/herbs. Sprinkle with cheese.
3. Wisk together eggs and milk. Pour into muffin cups. Bake at 350F, about 20-25 minutes.

Nutrition Services, AHS

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### The Foundation of True Self-Care Is Self-Compassion

By Charlie Gilkey on June 20, 2018



Self-compassion permeates our work here. It's not some special icing on the flourishing cake we're cooking – it's an essential ingredient. While you may be able to succeed without self-compassion for a while, you won't thrive. At some point, the harm, suffering, pain, or neglect you put yourself through will catch up with you. The bill *always* comes due.

We sometimes use “self-care” as a proxy for “self-compassion.” But they're actually different concepts. Self-compassion is *regarding* yourself compassionately. Self-care, by contrast, is *treating* yourself compassionately. The two terms sound interchangeable, but they contain a *thinking versus doing* distinction.

This is important because people can go through the motions of self-care without having self-compassion. Similarly, they can view themselves compassionately and still not take care of themselves. The two concepts, though, need to work together. Self-care *without* self-compassion discharges a debt, usually with suffering somewhere else. Self-care *with* self-compassion is a gift that doesn't have to be earned or repaid.

#### We Need Self-Compassion

And we need self-compassion. It lets us flourish because it keeps us from assuming we're superhumans or robots who can do far more than we'd expect anyone else to. Rarely do we look at someone who's sick, injured, grieving, handling a crisis, or bitten off way more than they can chew and expect them to get it all done perfectly with a smile on their faces. Yet that's exactly what we expect of ourselves when going through the same situations. Even when we can't soldier on, we expect we should be able to.

I've had to learn the distinction between self-care and self-compassion the hard way this year. I've been dealing with a medical thing that's caused a lot of pain, discomfort, fatigue, and debilitation. The morning focus blocks I love, need, and count on have turned into a crap shoot. And of course, this medical thing has happened at the worst time: It found me after setting up a major book deal, with all the necessary and negotiated deadlines. Of course, it not only takes my focus blocks from me but also adds work I'd rather not do. Of course, it requires me to take a break this summer for a needed minor surgery.

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You'd think I wouldn't struggle with self-compassion. After all, I gave it to myself when Angela and I were recovering from a car accident back in 2014. **But giving self-compassion in the past is no assurance you or I will give it in the future.** It's harder this time because I've found my purpose, act as the chair of a board, set up processes that work for me, and signed a book contract. I know what I want to do, know how to do it, and have everything I need to get it done — minus the sovereignty of my mornings. While the pain from my

current medical condition pales in comparison to the physical pain from the car accident, it's just high enough to block deep work but not lay me out.

### We Need Compassionate Self-Care

All that to say, my self-care over the last five months has not always come from a place of self-compassion. I've gone through the motions, of course, but my self-care has often been accompanied by unnecessary grimacing, complaining, and shadow-making. It's led to times of make-work, inbox processing, and mindless clicking when, if I were practicing self-compassion, I'd be semi-dozing in a recliner.

You see, self-compassion takes the pressure off. It accepts my demoralization, frustration, and melancholy and lessens all three. It helps me practice *true* self-care, getting out of or renegotiating commitments I can't possibly finish right now. Here's how to practice self-compassion:

1. **Replace.** Imagine someone you care deeply about, such as your four-year-old son, furry companion, or best friend. Now, insert that individual into whatever hardship you're dealing with.
2. **Think.** Ask what you'd expect of and from that person if they were in the situation you're in.
3. **Encourage.** Based on your answers, consider what you would encourage that person to do and what you would do for them if you could.
4. **Return.** Put yourself back in the situation.
5. **Rebut.** You're probably hearing a bunch of "Yeah, buts" right now. Rebut all of that harsh head trash by thinking about what you'd say to a friend with a case of them. It'll weaken the "Yeah buts" power.
6. **Act.** Take action on the things brainstormed in step 3.

Eventually, you won't have to do the swapping in step 1. You'll be able to accept being where you are and needing what you need aren't matters of better than or less than — they just are. It'll take practice; new difficulties, as my above situation illustrates, always do. Luckily, every day is a chance to practice.

You may not be able to change what you're going through, but you can change *how* you're going through it. Practicing self-compassion keeps you from making a hard situation even harder.

It also keeps a lot of the angst and sorrow and melancholy at bay. **It lets you rest.** And that's what you need right now so that you can productively flourish.