

# Caregiver Self-Care

Navigating caregiving role functions to achieve benefits for both caregiver and care receiver requires the implementation of Healthy Lifestyle Behaviors.

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Caregivers are the unseen backbone of the Canadian healthcare system. They provide three times as much unpaid care for every hour of care given in the formal healthcare system.

Most Canadians will either give or receive care at some point in their lives. Currently, one in four Canadians over the age of 15 serves as a caregiver. This includes approximately 5.2 million working individuals aged 19 to 70 who provide care for a loved one for more than 30 hours each week while also maintaining full-time employment.

Whether they are tending to an aging parent, supporting a family member with a chronic illness, or caring for a loved one with a disability, caregivers do the unpaid work that makes our system run.

# Caregivers are at risk for negative effects on their overall well being

Caregivers are at risk for negative effects on their overall well being, including physical and emotional health, quality of life, social engagement, economic status. Furthermore, due to the high prevalence of chronic disease in older adults a significant percentage of caregivers are at risk of exacerbating their own chronic disease.

Despite the negative impact of providing care for others many caregivers benefit from caregiving. They gain confidence in managing difficult situations, feel closer to the care recipient and are less apt to feel abandoned by other family members who are unable to provide hands-on care.

A survey conducted in 2023 by the Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence, which included over 3,000 caregivers, revealed that while caregiving can be a rewarding experience for many, it also has the potential to negatively affect their well-being. Nearly half of the caregivers (47%) reported feeling tired, and 37% felt overwhelmed due to their caregiving responsibilities. Additionally, one in four caregivers rated their mental health as fair or poor.

## Healthy Lifestyle Behaviors

Navigating caregiving role functions to achieve benefits for both caregiver and care receiver requires the implementation of **Healthy Lifestyle Behaviors**: physical activity, healthy eating, stress management and social engagement.

## Building Blocks of a Healthy Lifestyle

### **Stress Management**

Implementing techniques to reduce stress

### **Social Engagement**

Participating in social activities to enhance well-being



### **Physical Activity**

Engaging in regular exercise to maintain fitness

### **Healthy Eating**

Consuming a balanced diet rich in nutrients

It is essential to pace yourself and know your limits; here are some stress-relieving activities:

- Take a break and go for a 15-minute walk.
- Eat sensibly.
- Avoid excessive use of caffeine and alcohol.
- Drink plenty of water and juices.
- If you feel exhausted and need a break, take time off.
- Continue to participate in previous social and recreational activities.
- Be on the lookout for any changes in your habits, attitudes and moods.

## The Challenges

The adoption of these behaviors is challenging because personal behavioral habits are deeply imbedded in gender, cultural, ethnicity family life experiences.

For example initiating a program of physical activity with no prior experience can be challenging and stressful. Also, it may be important to consult your doctor whether starting a regime of physical activity may be contraindicated if you have significant health issues e.g. diagnoses of chronic disease. Similarly changing your diet according to the Canada Food Guide such as decreasing intake of fats and sugars and eliminating processed foods is not easy when location, and time factors dictate access to healthy foods.

In addressing the challenges to adopting Healthy Lifestyle Behaviors sharing the planning of physical activities, changes in diet and planning social engagements with family and friends can result in satisfying and effective changes for both caregiver and care recipient. An important source of practical and emotional support for caregivers is available through Provincial community health clinics.

### **Sources:**

Self-Care for Caregivers

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/reports-publications/responding-stressful-events/self-care-caregivers.html>

Caring for our caregivers: The power of social prescriptions

<https://hospitalnews.com/caring-for-our-caregivers-the-power-of-social-prescriptions/>

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