

# Caregiver Health Quick-Start Guide

## WELCOME

What does a healthy, well and resilient caregiver look like? We've identified four elements that we're going to outline for you in this quick-start guide.

First, your physical health. This includes how you're doing physically, with things like mobility, sleep, diet, and exercise.

Second, your mental and emotional health. How's your anxiety, your worry, your anger, your bitterness?

Third, your social and family health. How are the relationships that matter the very most in your life? Not just your caregiver relationship, but how are the others? Are they receiving nourishment and attention?

And lastly, your personal financial and career health.

All of these different areas of health have to be strong for you to be able to give the very best of yourself to the caregiving situation and to live the life you deserve.



## COMMUNITY FOR CAREGIVERS

Community for Caregivers is a place where we can connect, share ideas, and find better ways to give care. We hope you will join our community and share your story and ideas with us!

*This content has been created from our own personal observations and from our experiences of working with many caregivers over the years. We are not medical professionals, licensed therapists, attorneys, or financial advisors, so please visit with your doctor, attorney, financial advisor and/or other professionals for advice on your unique situation.*

## CAREGIVER HEALTH FULL COURSE

We dive deeper into each of these areas in our course, Caregiver Health, Wellness and Resilience.

The course provides full video lessons, clips of interviews with professionals and caregivers, reflection time, and interactive workbook activities to help you work through each of these areas of care.

This quick start guide was created to help give you a starting place—a high-level blueprint—as you work towards becoming healthier, more well, and more resilient in your caregiving journey.



# Caregiver Physical Health

## FIVE MAIN AREAS

Focusing on these five areas will help you increase your energy levels, reduce your stress levels, and strengthen your physical capacity for strength, stamina, and agility.



### NUTRITION

Fueling your body with the right nutrients will go a long way!

Try to eat whole, unprocessed foods that are in season and locally grown.

Avoid processed foods and sugar as they can leave you feeling fatigued.

Real energy comes from real food. Eat well to have energy for your day!

### HYDRATION

Staying hydrated throughout the day will help keep every system in your body functioning properly.

Most healthy adults need 6 - 8 glasses of water per day.

Track your intake and see if it could be improved!

### Energy Boosting Snacks

Here's a quick list of some of our favorite "pick-me-up" snacks. Please feel free to modify them to your own tastes and nutritional needs.

- Sliced Cucumbers dipped in Ranch Dressing (Sub other sliced veggies if desired)
- Sugar Snap Peas with Hummus (Try a variety of Hummus flavors)
- String Cheese and Nuts (Almonds, Cashews, and Pecans are our picks)
- Cottage Cheese with sliced Avocado (A few days after purchase so it's ripe)
- Red Bell Pepper slices with Guacamole (Many stores sell individual serving packs)
- Greek Yogurt and fresh or frozen Blueberries (Sub other fruit if desired)
- Sliced Deli Turkey with Colby Jack Cheese (Or any of your favorite meats/cheeses)
- Salad Mixes (Caesar, Southwest, Sweet Kale, Avocado Ranch, etc.)



*"To ensure good health: eat lightly, breathe deeply, live moderately, cultivate cheerfulness, and maintain an interest in life."*

*-William Londen*



### 10-Minute Workout Ideas

- Take a walk around the neighborhood.
- Go for an invigorating bike ride.
- Do jumping jacks, planks, lunges or other body weight resistance activities.
- Lift free-weights or use a resistance band.
- Dribble / shoot a basketball.
- Climb stairs.
- Warm up and then do some stretching.
- Do a 10-minute YouTube workout.
- Turn on music and dance.
- Practice martial arts or kickboxing.
- Use the wall for squats or push-ups.
- Go outside and jump rope.
- Learn new Yoga poses or practice pilates.

### EXERCISE

Staying hydrated throughout the day will help keep every system in your body functioning properly.

Most healthy adults need 6 - 8 glasses of water per day.

Track your intake and see if it could be improved!

### STRESS

Caregivers need to consciously find ways to reduce stress and it doesn't have to take a lot of time.

Remember to eat a healthy diet, get enough sleep, and exercise every day. Also try a favorite activity or listen to upbeat music.

Stress is covered more fully in the Mental & Emotional section.

### SLEEP

Caregiving work is demanding, and for optimal health you are going to need sleep!

Aim for 7-9 hours of sleep per night. Here's some ideas that can help:

Coordinate with community volunteers, family members, friends, or neighbors to have them take a turn to sit with your loved one while you rest.

Create a plan for bedtime routines to eliminate last minute/forgotten tasks that may take away precious minutes of sleep.

Use a sound machine or fan for white noise in the room where you sleep.

# Caregiver Mental & Emotional Health

## OVERCOMING STIGMA

Having mental and emotional challenges—in any life situation, including being caregiver—is NO mark of disgrace.

Dealing with mental and emotional issues should not be viewed negatively or with judgment.

As caregivers we must overcome the stigma of mental health.

## DEPRESSION

A family caregiver's risk for experiencing depression is much greater than that of a non-caregiver.

Studies have shown that up to 70% of caregivers will experience some level of depression.

If you are feeling this in your life, please don't wait to reach out for help from a medical professional.

## MIND-BODY CONNECTION

Mental and emotional health is the part of us that manifests in thoughts, feelings, moods, attitudes and more. It includes our mental state, cognitive health, emotions, spiritual health, and psychological health.

All these parts of mental and emotional health are tightly connected to physical health and social health. They are totally interconnected in a mind-body connection.

One common example is how your body responds to stress. Constant worry and stress can cause tense muscles, pain, headaches, high blood pressure, and stomach problems among others. And on the other hand, a physical-health problem can affect your emotions and your mood. You might become depressed, anxious, and stressed, which could affect how well you treat, manage, or cope with that physical ailment.

Now, the positive flip side is also very true—having a positive outlook on life, managing your emotions and improving hopeful thoughts has been proven again and again to measurably help physical conditions more than those who treat those conditions with less hope.

We absolutely know this connection is real and we KNOW that there is a strong relationship between your caregiving and your mental and emotional health.

## Resources for Help

There are many resources available when it comes to getting help and support for your mental and emotional health. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Meet with a professional therapist for counseling and/or medications
- Try meditation, yoga or practicing mindfulness
- Learn how to label and manage your stress levels
- Get more clarity on what things you can and can't control
- Work on understanding and controlling feelings of guilt
- Use music or creative arts, such as painting or poetry, to turn your mind to other activities that you enjoy and bring your happiness
- Get enough rest and rejuvenation
- Join a support group and share your experiences while learning from others



*"Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary." – Fred Rogers*



## Mindfulness

A mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations... used as a therapeutic technique

- Learn to be compassionate towards yourself and your limits
- Learn to move through intense emotions with skill and resilience
- Transform your inner critical voice into an encouraging, empowering voice
- Cope with stress, pain and the challenges of a caregiving role
- Mindfully communicate by listening deeply, speaking from strength

## STRESS

Psychologists have used the phrase, "name it to tame it."

Being able to know what we're feeling and labeling it can give us an important victory.

As we give our emotions and triggers a name, we become more equipped to know how to prevent, treat or cope with those thoughts, feelings, and emotions.

## GUILT

You likely won't be able to avoid guilt completely while being a caregiver, so let the good guilt guide you and learn to monitor and acknowledge harmful guilt.

Chronic and toxic guilt are not helpful emotions and need to be addressed and managed.

## LEARNING WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL AND WHAT YOU CAN'T

In order to make a plan about what we can do about the triggers that lead us to stressful emotions and thoughts, we have to start by thinking through what we have control over and what we don't.

There are some situations where we have control, some where we have influence, and some where we have no control.

Learning to separate these out will provide greater peace of mind and allow you to focus on what you CAN do for the caregiving situation.

# Caregiver Social & Family Health

## WE ARE SOCIAL CREATURES

We know the demands of caregiving can place a strain on the relationships in your life.

As a caregiver, being socially connected is crucial for both for introverts and extroverts.

As you learn how to nourish, balance, and put boundaries around your relationships, you will get stronger in your social and family health.



### INTROVERTS

Introverts may wish to have a few close relationships and enjoy spending one-on-one time with people they know well and care about.

These relationships are invaluable while navigating the caregiving path.

Try to stay connected, even when it's hard to reach out.

### EXTROVERTS

Extroverts know how valuable time is with family and friends. They are energized and revitalized when they get to spend time with people.

If you are an extrovert, keep your contact list updated and reach out to people often. Whether you are gathering with family members or friends, having a large social circle will help you recharge.



## COMMUNITY FOR CAREGIVERS

### Fun Activity Ideas

Here's a quick list of some of our favorite activities to do with our recipient of care, our family members, and our friends.

- Play a game together. Ideas: card games, board games, charades, or BINGO
- Have a movie night. Ideas: favorite classic movie, musicals, Disney, trilogies
- Go out for ice cream and enjoy nature at a park or nearby lake
- Attend a sporting event. Ideas: local high school team, little league, pro teams
- Read together. Ideas: poetry, classic novel, short stories, travel blogs
- Cook something special. Ideas: Find a new recipe, shop for ingredients, cook together if possible, enjoy the meal or dessert.
- Do an "Armchair Travel" activity. Ideas: Pick any place in the world and then watch a travel documentary on YouTube, research a few fun facts, try an activity from the location / culture, and find a snack or meal that represents their local cuisine.
- Visit a museum, theater, or historic site. Ideas: free local art galleries, children's theaters, dinner theater, science museum, history museum, historic home tour.
- Take a scenic drive and listen to a favorite playlist or podcast.
- Paint on canvas while watching a simple "How To" guide on the internet.
- Take a walk around the mall and do some window shopping or people watching.
- Reminisce about the past. Ideas: select a topic to discuss--for example, music hits from their childhood or trips they have taken, talk about best friends or family members and what you love about them, do some family history or journaling.
- Make a holiday craft or decorate for the season. Ideas: Go shopping for supplies at the dollar store or local thrift store.
- Adopt a pen pal and write letters to send in the mail.

*"Connecting with others gives us a sense of inclusion, connection, interaction, safety, and community. Your vibe attracts your tribe, so if you want to attract positive and healthy relationships, be one!" - Susan C Young*

### Communication Tips and Tricks

- Be open and honest
- Set clear expectations when needed
- Try to understand other points of view
- Find quiet time away from the care situation to discuss hard topics
- Use a therapist or another third-party to help mediate if needed
- Write things down to discuss and / or ponder on when communication is not immediately possible



### NOURISH RELATIONSHIPS

One of the best ways to nourish your relationships is by spending time with them.

Make space in your life to do activities together, have open and honest communication, try to understand what they are feeling and experiencing, and find common ground.

### ADJUST BOUNDARIES

Many caregivers struggle with adjusting boundaries, especially with their recipient of care, but this step is necessary if you have unhealthy relationships with anyone in your social circles.

Spend some time thinking about what relationships need to be adjusted in your life.

### THOUGHTS FROM MATT - CO-FOUNDER AND ADMIN

I've got a lot to teach, but so do you—because a community, and the root of that word "community" is tied to ideas of "togetherness, commonalities, shared experiences, and even friendly help and relief." A community is powerful. My community when I was a caregiver helped me in ways I can't even say. I believe, that a strong community for caregivers will do that—it will make that work just a little easier, just a little better, and will make it more peaceful. Will you join me, and others who care, in building a thriving community for caregivers? I'm confident that, together, we can and will make caregiving better.

# Caregiver Financial & Career Health

## MAKING CHOICES

As a caregiver, it is so important that your financial and career decisions are as deliberate as you can make them—that you understand the consequences of those decisions and don't wake up having traded what felt urgent and important today for what was incredibly more important tomorrow.

Just like giving your time to caregiving, every dollar that you give to the care situation is a dollar that you won't have to spend on another critical part of your life—on your own rent or mortgage, on food, on your children, on your interests, on your own retirement, on your own future care. And, if you need to replenish the dollars spent, you'll have to trade more of your future time to restore that money spent.

## FINANCIAL HEALTH

This includes your money, your savings, your investments—all of your assets and equities; as well as your liabilities—your debts.

Also consider your insurances and other protections against risk.

And, all of your financial planning... including trusts, your will, and any related legal estate documents.

## CAREER HEALTH

Comprised of your job, your relationship with your employer if you have one, your future jobs, your career plan, any business that you might operate or that you want to start or exit—eventually leading to full-time retirement.

## How to Strengthen Financial Health

- Set your financial boundaries as a caregiver
- Understand the costs of care
- Know the care recipient's resources
- Ask about family resources
- Reach out for government & public resources
- Getting help from other sources

*"I find myself telling people, if you don't have a personal budget already built, do not feel any confidence spending money on the condition of care, because you don't know what pocket you're robbing from to make that spend. And if you do have a personal budget, then figure out how much you're really able and willing to spend on caregiving, and integrate it into your annual, monthly, and weekly budget. One of the greatest enemies in the caregiving experience is the slippery slopes that have no plan and no deliberate guidance, where we wake up one day to our futures having been mortgaged by our caregiving." - Matt Beecher*



## Financial Aid Resources

- Medicaid: Check with your state's office
- Cash & Counseling Programs—Consumer Direction or Self-Directed Care
- Home and Community-Based Services Programs (HCBS)
- Long-Term Care Insurance
- Veteran-Directed Home and Community-Based Services Program (VD-HCBS)
- Tax Incentives
- The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA)
- Paid Leave for Caregiving Employees
- Unemployment
- Area Agency on Aging (AAA)
- AARP Financial/Legal Resources
- PayingforCare.org

## CREATE A PLAN

Carefully consider the impact of a decision to alter work or to alter caregiving. Live with NO REGRETS.

Work with/get help from others in the Caregiving Ecosystem—family, friends, community resources, social workers, elder-law attorneys, etc. as you create a plan that works for you and your future!

## EMPLOYERS

Many employers do a lot more than offer the minimum FMLA coverage.

More and more, employers are providing assessments of the recipient of care, providing flexible work arrangements, reimbursement for respite care, and coaching.

## COMPLETELY INTERCONNECTED

Your financial and career health will have a strong influence on your mental and emotional health, on your physical health, on your family and social health... and those other areas will affect and influence this one.

For example, you may have a lot of social connections through your employment or business interests that keep you healthy socially. Likewise, your mental and emotional health can thrive or decline based on your working experiences.

As we've said multiple times, it's important that you are able to invest in YOUR health, your wellness, and your resilience—to take care of YOU, first and foremost because you are worth that care!