

## Maintaining Your Health and the Health of Your Loved One By: Diana Primavesi, Client Support Coordinator

Did you know caregivers can be at increased risk of heart disease and other serious health concerns? When caring for someone with a serious illness like dementia, it can be difficult to balance care responsibilities and your own needs.

A variety of factors can contribute to poor health for caregivers, including stress, lack of time for themselves, and the emotional and physical demands of providing care. Often caregivers neglect their own medical appointments and treatments because they are already overwhelmed.

One of the most important things you can do as a caregiver is take care of yourself. You have the right to be as healthy as possible. You also will be better able to provide care if you remain well. Here are some suggestions.

- 1) **Reach out for help** – even caregivers with a good support system often neglect their own needs. When asking for help, think about what would benefit you, not just the person with dementia. Having a firm commitment from a helper can be important. There's a big difference between "our son comes by regularly to help" and "our son comes every Tuesday to take his dad for an outing." The first arrangement leaves the caregiver uncertain when to expect the next visit. The second gives her something to look forward to and allows her to make plans to meet a friend or make a personal appointment.
- 2) **Get active** – being physically active is a proven key to better health but trying to change your activity habits can be challenging. Start small – if it's cold outside, try going for a walk inside your apartment building or learning chair exercises. Joining a group exercise program or hooking up with a buddy can be a great motivator and provide social interaction.
- 3) **Reduce stress** – stress is a fact of life. Often our attitude and how we respond to our situation can have a big impact on our experience. Adjusting your expectations is a great way to reduce stress. Try embracing the idea of "good enough" rather than striving for perfect. If you are struggling, reach out and talk with a friend, family member, or professional.
- 4) **Prioritize your own health** – attend regular medical appointments and monitor your chronic conditions. If a health concern arises, seek medical attention rather than delaying.

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# Alzheimer Society

PETERBOROUGH, KAWARTHA LAKES, NORTHUMBERLAND & HALIBURTON

As a caregiver, taking time to care for yourself can feel like an added burden – one more thing on your “to do” list. But small changes can add up to big benefits. So ask yourself: What small

thing could I do to take care of my health this month? Then go ahead and try it. You might be pleased by the results.

The Alzheimer Society offers programs designed to support the health of persons with dementia and their care partners. Support and education groups reduce feelings of isolation and provide an opportunity to learn coping strategies to make daily situations easier. The Step Out Walking Club combines the benefits of a weekly walk and social time with new friends. The Friendly Visitor program provides companionship for the person with dementia and respite for the caregiver. This month, your small step towards self-care might be to pick up the phone and call us.

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