

Looking after yourself while looking after them

Caregiving is a long race with no rest days built in — here is how to keep going without running yourself into the ground.

Caregivers and family

Educational draft. Clinical review pending. Quotations retained from the original text are not verified member testimonials.

Everything about this recovery is about them — appointments, medications, walking, moods. And the person holding all of it is you, running on your own reserve of sleep and patience. This page is not a guilt trip. It is the practical case for why looking after you is part of looking after them.

Why your battery matters

You are the system their recovery runs on. When you are exhausted, the system fails slowly: a forgotten medication, a missed call, a short temper at the worst moment. Caregivers who are drained do not just feel worse — the person they care for gets worse care. Resting is not selfishness. It is the maintenance the whole operation depends on.

The practices that work

- Sleep in shifts. If someone can stay with them for a few hours — even one afternoon a week — take the sleep. It is not a luxury; it is a refill.
- Eat like a person. Regular meals, real food, water. Skipping meals to save time costs more time in the end.
- Keep your own appointments and your own medications. Your health is not on hold; it is the only reserve you have.
- Get out of the house every day, even for ten minutes. Fresh air is cheap and it works.
- Build the backup list now: three people who could step in — for a shopping run, a hospital visit, an hour of company. Write their names down while things are calm.

- Accept offers, literally. When people say “let me know what I can do,” give them one small thing.

The guilt

Guilt is the tax caregivers pay for resting. Expect it, and answer it with this: a rested you is a better caregiver than a burnt-out one. You are allowed to enjoy things while they recover. You are allowed to be okay.

“My sister watched him one afternoon a week. That afternoon kept me sane, and he loved her visits. Everyone thought I was being noble. I was being smart.”

What to ask your team

- How long does this level of care usually last — so I can plan my own life?
- Is there any support available to us — home nursing or a care service?
- If I am struggling, is there someone I can speak to through the hospital?

Take it to your team

Be honest at appointments about how you are coping. The team can only plan around what they know. A caregiver who asks for support is not failing — they are managing.

Call for help if

Your own health starts slipping: chest pain or palpitations of your own, panic attacks, or you are missing your own medications because you are too busy. And if you reach the point where you no longer trust yourself to care for them safely, that is a call too — to your own doctor or the team, not to silence.

You are the one holding the family together, and families are held by real, tired, fed, rested people. The decisions about their care belong to them and their own team — and the decision to look after yourself is yours, and it is right.

Questions to take to my team

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For discussion and personal reference. Your care team's individual instructions take priority. For an emergency, contact your local emergency service; do not wait for a community reply.