

# TOP 10 CAREGIVER TIPS

Answers to your most challenging questions!



*WELLNESS RESOURCE SUPPORT*

# **TOP 10 CAREGIVER TIPS**

**Answers to Your Most Challenging Questions!**

**A Guide By**

*Wellness Resource Support*

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## Introduction

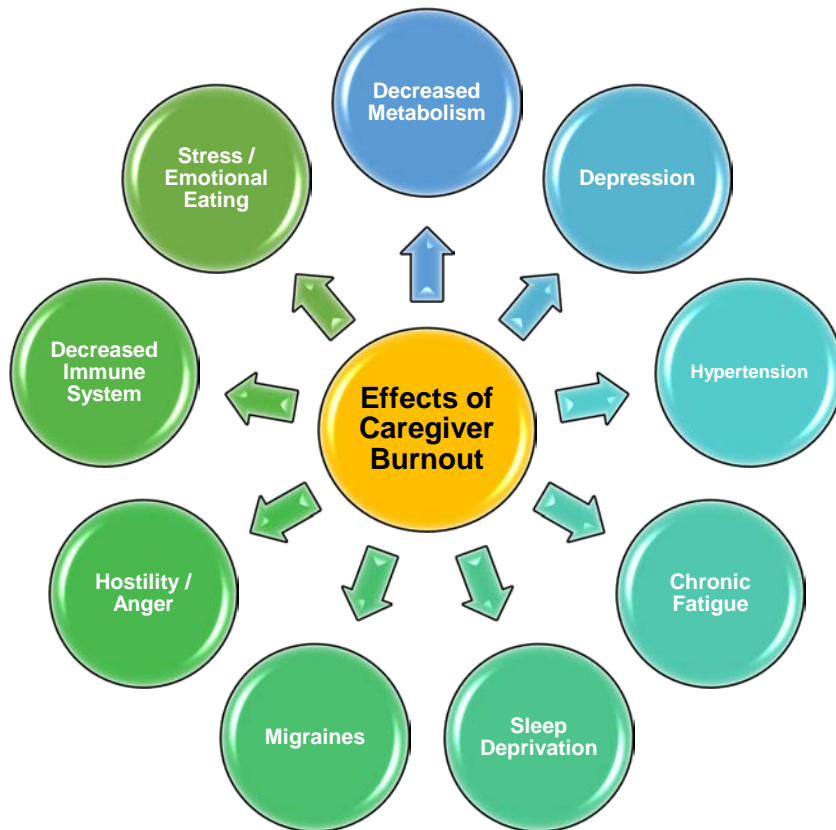
Congratulations on taking the next steps to be a better caregiver. This role is not for everyone and the fact you stood up and assumed the role is a big accomplishment. As caregivers, it's easy to become lost or swallowed up in the everyday tasks associated with caring for a child or adult. For some, being a caregiver is a lifelong commitment, for others it could be just a few months. It's important that you find resources, such as this guide, to help navigate you through the process.

As caregivers, we understand these challenges. Wellness Resource Support was started out of the frustration one family faced while caring for Karen, a loving wife, mom and grandmother. After suffering from a severe stroke and going into a coma followed by multiple health challenges along the way. We learned to come together as a family and fight for her when she couldn't fight for herself.

As you read through these tips, your most challenging questions will be answered. This guide will offer you resources and ways to make caring for your loved one less complicated. You will learn ways to care for yourself, get help and be prepared. The tips we include here, helped us face our challenges and we know using this guide will help you too!

## Tip 1: Self Care

Do you feel tired even when you get a good night's sleep? Are you easily irritated or angry most days? Do you get depressed? Feel isolated or hopeless? If you answered yes to most of these questions then you are probably suffering from caregiver burnout.



One of the most important tasks in being a caregiver is learning to take care of yourself in the process. There's a reason the airlines tell you place the oxygen mask on yourself before helping others. Imagine being on a sinking ship with your loved one who can't swim. If you were to do your best to help keep your loved one afloat eventually you would tire and both of you would drown. If you put on a life jacket first, then you'd be able to keep your loved one afloat for as long as you

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need. The life jacket would take on the burden and aid you when water gets rough. The same principle applies in caregiving.

It's important that you don't lose yourself. Be sure you stay connected with family and friends. Find support in a group, church, therapist or even online Facebook groups like [Caregiver Resources](#). Knowing that you are not alone and facing the same challenges as so many others can help you cope with the emotional drain of being a caregiver.

Physical care is another important part to self-care. Taking a daily stroll around the block or going to a gym, allowing yourself time away can help you recharge and be a better caregiver. Keeping in shape, and taking care of your health will make the physical burdens less painful. I've met so many caregivers that suffer from body aches caused by lifting and changing loved ones. They neglect their own care and put everything they have into being a caregiver.

You know that feeling of worry and hopelessness? It's probably what's keeping you from getting a good night's sleep. The anxiety of being responsible for someone else's care is a big weight to carry around. Making all the decisions and looking for alternatives is a lot of pressure for one person to handle. Before going to bed, write down all your concerns, questions or thoughts in a journal, it's called dumping. By unloading all those random worries so that you can clear your mind for a good night's sleep. Another suggestion is to consider meditation. By using apps like [Calm](#) for just 5 minutes before bedtime can help you get a peaceful rest.

With restless sleep, physical pain and fatigue, no wonder you're irritable and angry. Choosing to focus on the positive in every situation can help you and your

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loved one live a more peaceful existence. Every time you say a negative phrase think about how you can rephrase it to be a positive. Eventually you'll be surprised at how those negative thoughts show up less and less. Additionally, create some affirmations that you can say to yourself daily expressing gratitude for what makes you happy. A strong belief in one self will help cope during the times when your loved one may be lashing out.



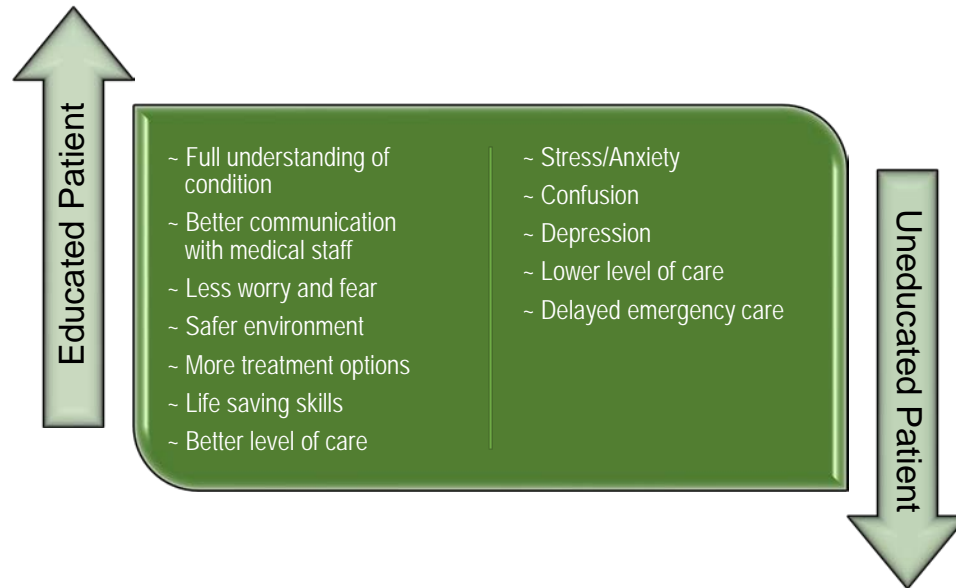
## Tip 2: Education

Having a chronic illness can be life changing. Treatments and required care are very specific and vary by illness. Getting proper training by a professional can make a big difference in daily care. For example, if you are treating someone with mobility challenges, it's best to be trained by a physical therapist on the safe and easy ways to move your loved one.

Imagine you are the caregiver for a child with a respiratory disease. Given the importance of getting enough oxygen; wouldn't it be ideal to know warning signs? Do you know that if a person's oxygen level is dropping to a dangerous level their lips will turn blue? If that child stopped breathing would you know what to do? Knowing things like this can save a life. Educating yourself about the illness of your loved one can help you assess if there is an emergency and to seek help immediately.

If you are caring for someone who gets a cut while taking blood thinners, do you know how to control the bleeding? Aside from knowing the warning signs, being educated on emergency care buys you valuable time while waiting for help. There are many medical facilities and private companies like American Red Cross, that offer basic training on life saving skills like first aid and CPR. We often share local trainings on our Facebook page [Wellness Resource Support](#) and we list local and national trainings on our [website](#) for members to easily access. There are also many online training courses and [apps](#) that offer emergency tips.

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Once you are informed, you can educate your loved one and help them understand what's going on with their body. Information on care and treatment, allow you work more efficiently with the medical team caring for your loved one. Medical advances are happening more quickly than doctors are able to learn. By sharing what you've learned and experienced while caring for your loved one, it helps open the communication for a better diagnosis which leads to more treatment options.

### Tip 3: Seeking Help

You are not a super hero! One of the biggest complaints we hear from caregivers is that they don't have help. Seeking and accepting help is difficult for a caregiver. It means less control over the situation and admitting they cannot do it alone. It's important to seek help and accept it. We understand that not everyone has a large network or family that can help. Reaching out and asking if someone can give you a break for even an hour can help your mental status. If you are sharing caregiving responsibilities, create a schedule; plan out a calendar for the month on who can help out on what days or hours.



Many caregivers feel family and friends should offer help which is one of the biggest misconceptions. People are intimidated by caregiving but if you ask for help with simple tasks, you'll be surprised by the responses you get. Help can come in the form of sitting with your loved one while you run errands or allowing someone else to run errands for you.

Family and friends are not the only resource for getting help with care. Hiring an aid for a few hours a week can be a big stress reducer for the caregiver and different stimulation for your loved one. Reach out to local churches in the area to see if they have volunteers for companion care. There are many people in the

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church who spend time with sick patients, or help with errands to ease your burden.

Many local high schools and community groups, such as the girl scouts, now require students to do volunteer work to earn credits or badges.

Certain states offer respite care, which allows caregivers time for themselves. We list many types of assistance on our [website](#) sorted by state. Utilize the resources around you and keep making calls until you find some solutions.

## Tip 4: Connecting

Do you ever feel isolated or alone? Do you miss the days before you were a caregiver when life seemed so much simpler and more enjoyable? Are you often turning down offers to socialize? You could be dealing with depression.

Finding empathetic people that understand what you are going through can be tough. Most people will show empathy for the patient but not for the caregiver. Majority of outsiders have no idea what being a caregiver really means, the sacrifices, the hardships, the fear and anxiety that something can happen at any given moment. Let's not forget the pressure of doing everything perfectly because one wrong move can be detrimental to your loved one's health.



The human connection is an important part of our health. Knowing there is someone for you to turn to during times of anguish or upset can help you keep your sanity. There are many online support groups that allow you to connect with other caregivers. [Wellness Resource Support](#) also offers a monthly group call for it's members along with a private group for caregivers to connect and support one another or exchange tips and advice.

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Options for online therapy such as [Better Health](#) are ideal for caregivers that are unable to leave their loved one for regularly scheduled appointments. This will allow you to work with a professional at a convenient time in your caregiving schedule.

## Tip 5: Documentation

Do you get audited by family members? Constantly being questioned or criticized for your actions? Well you're not alone! This is such a common occurrence for caregivers. The audits and questions come from people who offer little or no help yet want to keep you in check about managing money and suggest "better" ways to care for your loved one. The solution? Get all your paperwork in order so everyone knows their role.

There are a few key documents that every family should have regardless of their stages of illness:

**The Family Agreement** is a legal document outlining a patient's wishes for their care. Sections include who will be primary caregiver, who will handle billing, financials, etc. It breaks out the major components of care and creates a rule book of how things should be handled. Everyone agrees to their roles and this minimizes some questions and arguments.

**The Health Care Proxy (HCP)** appoints an agent to legally make healthcare decisions on behalf of the patient, when the patient is incapable of making and executing their own healthcare decisions. Patients can list restrictions and wishes for long term care, DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) conditions, life support and more. It is important that the patient's doctors and medical team are given copies of this document so they are willing to discuss a medical plan.

**The Durable Financial Power of Attorney** appoints someone to manage and access your finances in the event that you become incapacitated and are unable to make those decisions yourself. It gives the appointee legal authority to

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act on your behalf regarding financial decisions. This could come in handy if your loved one is in a coma or vegetative state and the family needs access to a bank account to pay for medical care.

We list resources on our [website](#) that offer free or low cost options to getting these documents drafted. Another great resource for shared caregiving is an app called [Outpatient](#). This app works with your smartphone and allows designated family members to share information about a patient's care. You can add things like medication lists, medical appointments, allergies and also include notes after each medical appointment to keep everyone informed.



## Tip 6: Assistance

Are you struggling to pay for your loved one's prescriptions? Did you suddenly get hit with a situation that now forces you to make changes to your home for accessibility? How about needing an aid around the clock to care for your loved one? These are common worries of a caregiver, and where do you turn for answers? The internet! Sure, you can spend hours going through pages of sites online searching for programs, grants or trainings. Wouldn't it be much easier if you could just go to one site?

Patients and caregivers are often distracted with searching for answers which takes time away from caregiving. Finding the right programs in your state can be a huge benefit to your situation.

There are a variety of prescription programs like [GoodRX](#) that offer free or low cost options for generic medications. [Accessible Go](#) offers travel options for those with mobility challenges. [Safe Sittings](#) is another great resource for babysitters that are trained to care for children with diabetes.

You can start by reaching out to your local politician's office to get contact information for local assistance programs. You can also look up caregiver sites that often list the key websites for assistance. A better alternative is to sign up for a membership site that already has a variety of programs, like the ones listed above, for you to sort through based on your situation. Our [website](#) lists private and public programs nation-wide and state specific for our members to browse through.

## Tip 7: Encouragement

Do you hear “I can’t” on a regular basis? Are your loved ones fighting everything you do because they want to be left alone? Do your loved ones cry or yell often and have signs of depression? This is all part of negative thinking. Studies found that prolonged negative thinking diminishes the brain’s ability to think, reason and form memories. Additionally, the American Academy of Neurology reported that cynical thinking also produces a greater risk for dementia.

Encouragement creates an environment for positivity which leads to more frequent “wins” and happy moments. The first step in encouraging your loved one is changing your vocabulary and how you speak to and around them. Patients should be encouraged to say “I can” or “I will” when faced with a new challenge. When a person repeatedly says I can do \_\_\_\_\_, it’s been found that eventually they are able to complete the task. Having the patient say it aloud repeatedly stimulates different parts of the brain to help the patient truly believe they can accomplish a task.

Another phrase to replace is “problem” and use “challenge” since challenges are able to be resolved whereas problems focus on the negative. Instead of “trying” to do \_\_\_\_\_ have your loved one say “I am” or “I will” do \_\_\_\_\_.

The next step in encouragement is a simple one, smile! Talking to someone while smiling makes it difficult to use an angry or demeaning tone. When patients are depressed, ask them to smile and try to cry at the same time. It’s not possible to cry and be upset while holding a huge Kool-aide smile. So sit back and show the world your pearly whites!

## Tip 8: Patience

Following on the heels of encouragement, having patience when dealing with a loved one is a key function in caregiving. Do you find that you are often answering the same questions over and over or repeating the same instructions or warnings? How about cleaning up one mess to turn around minutes later to a bigger mess? If you thought “but that sounds like me dealing with my kids” you’re right! Being a caregiver is A LOT like being a parent. In some cases, being a caregiver is a dual role with parenting. Caregiving for an adult can have some similarities since, like a child, they are often not independent enough to care for themselves.

Imagine you are the patient and you are no longer able to control your bowel movements. You have an accident and your child now has to be the one to change you. How would you feel knowing that you are an adult and now have to be changed like a baby? Would that make you feel like less of a person? How would dealing with the realization that you are no longer in control over certain parts of your body make you feel? And the fact you have now become a burden to your child? These are the emotions your loved ones are dealing with. It’s not easy to be in the situation where you are solely relying on others for so much help. Having patience and understanding while your loved ones are struggling can make a situation less stressful.

Now think of your role as a caregiving parent, seeing your child in pain or scared can be heartbreaking and scary. The uncertainties of chronic illness and worrying “will my child live a long healthy life?” Most parents will not tell their child

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all the details of their illness to protect them. Imagine being a child and not fully knowing or understanding what's going on. How do you think a child will react? Will they act out or become defiant? Will they do things behind your back because they know you'll worry or stop them from engaging in "risky" behavior?

This is where patience comes in. Allowing yourself to understand the behaviors that bother you the most will give you the knowledge to address the situation before it gets out of control. Having patience with your loved one (old or young) will open your eyes to the triggers and improve communication and break down some barriers in the relationship. After all aren't all just scared children when it comes down to it?

## Tip 9: Medical Team

Do you have a good relationship with the medical staff overseeing care of your loved one? Do you make sure copies of all test results are sent to a primary doctor? When someone has a chronic illness, they are usually visiting with many different specialists. To assume that each doctor is talking to the next would not be a safe assumption. It is very important that you have all records and test centralized with one doctor overseeing care. Inform that doctor you'd like them to take on that role. Keeping your primary doctor informed can make a huge difference in caregiving. If they are aware of all treatments and medications, it may be easier to get a refill on a prescription or arrange certain home care services such as therapies or bloodwork.

Patients and caregivers who are not comfortable with their doctors will often hold back vital information or misrepresent the severity of their condition. The patient/doctor relationship should consist of open, honest communication so warning signs are made visible to prevent further medical challenges. Finding a medical team you trust, can be a life saver!

Medical staff use confusing medical terminology which can be super scary to patients and caregivers, when they don't fully understand the diagnosis or treatment. Since most people will feel stupid asking the medical staff to simplify the terminology, they often leave more confused than prior to the visit. [Wellness Resource Support](#) offers a way for patients to understand what's going on by simplifying the terminology in our medical dictionary.

## Tip 10: Resources

Did you ever imagine that you'd be changing adult diapers? Have you been properly trained on CPR for a child? Does the diagnosis and treatment of your loved one make sense to you?

Resources are an important part of caregiving. Are you spending hours on a regular basis looking up tools that may help daily living, or programs that can help you and/or your loved one? Isn't your time better served in the care of your loved one rather than doing research?

Caregivers and patients have one major thing in common and that's a feeling of being overwhelmed. Patients have to come to terms with their illness and all the changes involved, and, in part face their own mortality. Caregivers are forced to change everything to make adjustments to be there to care for, and support their loved one. It can be a very lonely and exhausting role.

[Wellness Resource Support](#) gives patients and caregivers information and resources to help you understand and manage your medical care. We offer one on one consultations with a patient champion to find the solutions to your current challenges. We know the frustration! We know the stress! We know the confusion! And we have the answers!