



Family Caregivers of BC

SELF-CARE DURING UNCERTAIN TIMES

"Know the importance of yourself. Know that the healthier you are, mentally and physically, the better you will be able to care for someone else. Taking baby steps at the beginning will go a long way." - Marlene Schlotterbeck

SELF-CARE FOR CAREGIVERS IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

If you are the main caregiver to someone it is important to consider support options if you or your family member, partner, friend or neighbour needs to self-quarantine or becomes ill. Please reach out to your support network to plan ahead, which may include your family doctor and other physicians as well as home-care providers.

Self-isolation is an important part of preventing the spread of COVID-19 but it can contribute to feelings of loneliness, hopelessness and affect your mental health.

If you are concerned that you may have been exposed to, or experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, please use the [BC self-assessment tool](#)

1. Practice self-care.

Self-care isn't an indulgence; it's a practice. It is the small baby steps we take that help us practice true self-care.

2. Why does self-care feel so hard?

Part of what makes self-care so tough is that it requires us to be tough-minded, to spend time (that we may not feel we have) to understand our priorities and it requires us to hold respect for both ourselves and the people we are caring for.

The other part that makes it hard, is that it takes work to do the every day things that are good for us, rather than only doing the things that make us feel good. For example, choosing to watch one Netflix show and then go for a walk rather than watch 2 shows and not go for a walk. Or maybe saying no to something you don't want to do, even though you know someone might get upset with you.

3. The root of self-care is self-awareness.

How we look after ourselves is deeply personal and unique for all of us. Self-care practices all have the common thread of knowing ourselves. It includes acknowledging how you feel and seeing and hearing yourself within the situation. It also includes identifying what comfort will meet your needs and then integrating any activity that creates a sense of overall well-being.

Why is self-awareness important? It allows us to take notice of our thoughts and emotions as they arise, which then supports you in taking action. You first need to be self-aware to be able to implement self-care strategies. We might ask ourselves, "what will support me in this moment?" It may be a long walk, or a rest. Self-care can be calling a friend, or saying 'yes'; or 'no' to a request from someone else. Actively engaging in self-care practices can help you meet your own needs, while supporting you to feel more grounded or recharged as you care for others.

4. Self-care means being nice to yourself.

For caregivers, self-compassion is shown to lead to more satisfaction caregiving for someone and decreases the chances of burnout. Challenges that come with caregiving can be met with self-reflection and empathy by saying, "This is hard right now. It's only natural that I'm feeling sad or stressed."

"Self-compassion is crucial for caregivers - not only because it helps us forgive ourselves for inevitable mistakes, but also because it allows us to acknowledge and comfort ourselves for the difficulties of our caregiving role." Dr. Kristin Neff, world leading expert and researcher on self-compassion.

5. Self-care doesn't mean self-improvement.

Activities of self-care can be beneficial and have positive effects on your health or fitness but the main goals of self-care are: to meet your own needs, and to feel better, cared for, and/or more grounded. It is important to ask yourself, "What is my non-negotiable today?" It can look very different depending on the day.

6. Stay connected.

Connecting with other caregivers and allowing others to share in the care is an important part of self-care. A large challenge for caregivers is isolation. Caregivers are busy juggling many roles and responsibilities and few make time for friends.

Think about who is in your support circles - those who you can rely on for support. Support is essential for caregivers - and should not be left to chance. Think of family, friends, neighbours and acquaintances as a circle surrounding you. Create a 'Circle of Support' to maximize positive potential of your social connections.

7. Asking for and accepting help.

Asking for and accepting help is something most caregivers struggle with. Sometimes we place a value on independence and/or maybe we don't want to put people out or feel we are a burden to others. Caregivers tell us - caregiving is NOT something that can be accomplished alone, at least not for very long.

Here are a few ideas:

- Identify your needs - get specific and be direct.
- Determine who you can ask for help
- Explore who to ask for help and support - it's often helpful to be direct
- Follow up on offers
- Appreciate and validate
- Keep asking

8. Where can you get more support and resources?

Call the Family Caregivers of BC Support line Toll Free at 1-877-520-3267, Monday to Friday 8:30 am to 4:00 pm. You can also read our booklet, ["Taking Care of Yourself: Self-Care Strategies for Family and Friend Caregivers."](#)