

Honoring Your Needs While Tending To Another's Needs

Lyn Stuart, Caregiver Support Coordinator, Cape Breton

Caregivers are touted as the selfless unsung heroes of our communities. Giving themselves to their care recipients, tirelessly, they are part of the glue that holds our communities and health care system together.

Not without its cost, caregiving can be all-encompassing labor of love and/or duty. When you're at your full capacity in caring for another person, what happens to your needs?

How can we, as a collective of caregivers, ensure that we honor our needs as we tend to other's needs?

We hear that at times caregivers are not seen as valued members of the care team. They are not consulted on what their needs are by their primary care practitioners and other members of the care team. Without recognition, caregivers can feel invisible, which can make their needs invisible too. As caregivers balance the many spinning plates, often the same plate drops over and over again - *their own needs*. How can caregivers remember to honor their own needs with all they are up against?

It would be remiss if I didn't mention the roadblocks. Time, energy, and support to name a few along with guilt and ability to step away. Would it be fair to say it is easier to ignore our needs than to address them?

To begin to create a balance between caring for yourself while caring for others: start small. Read our [Where to Begin Guide](#) (even if you aren't beginning your journey) and put everything down on paper. Take note of who is doing what. Are there any shifts that can be made? Boundaries to create? Often people want to help, they just don't know the how, when or what. Asking for help is the bravest action you can make - reach out. Be specific. Practice saying no.

Try some self-reflection:

- How are you doing?
- How do you feel about how you are showing up for yourself?
- Can you add one thing into your day that will help fill your own cup as you provide care for your person?
- How can you celebrate yourself and all that you have done today?
- Can you let go of one thing that doesn't serve you and pass one thing on to someone else?

To consider when tending to your own needs:

- Remember, your needs are not a suggestion. They are sustenance.
- Strive for progress, not perfection. You are a human, not a robot!
- Any action is better than no action at all. Small moments of tending to yourself add up.
- You are worthy of the same love and care you give every day.
- You deserve the same help that you provide to others.
- Practice self-compassion.

Feel free to use this wellness prescription, or create your own.

1. Gratitude practice. 1 x day
2. 15-minute brisk walk. 4-5 x week
3. Mindful breathing. 2 minutes each day
4. Connection. 2 minutes each day.
5. Ritualize the practice of checking in with yourself every day.
6. Reach out to your Caregiver Support Coordinator - we are here to help!

