

Practicing Mindfulness to Relieve Caregiver Stress

Mental Well-Being

Caregiving isn't easy. Seeing to a loved one's needs — often while balancing work and family — can stress even the most cheerful and organized person.

Dangers of Stress

Stress releases hormones that cause changes in your body. In the short term, these hormones can help you fight or flee danger and can increase your awareness of other threats. Our bodies can handle short-term stress, but caregiving is long-term stress. If you don't relieve this stress, it can damage your health. Chronic stress can weaken your immune system and make you tired, and it can make you more likely to get depressed or anxious.

Mindfulness for Caregivers

Caregivers are often so focused on caring for others that they neglect their own needs. It's important to get a handle on stress before it gets the best of you. So put taking care of yourself on your to-do list.

Your well-being is just as important as your loved one's. See our Self-Care for Caregivers Guide to learn how you can stay healthy and provide the best care for your loved one.

[Read Our Self-Care Guide](#)

Having a positive attitude is one way to avoid stress. Looking on the bright side won't stop bad things from happening. But choosing how you react can make you feel more in

control. Some people that find prayer relieves stress. Another useful tool is mindfulness.

Mindfulness is about being in the moment. It's about not letting your thoughts race into the future or dwell on the past. You can quiet your mind by focusing on your breath and other body sensations. Mindfulness can relax you and restore your sense of well-being.

Mindfulness has proven mental and physical benefits. It has been linked to [decreased levels of the stress hormone cortisol](#) and to lower blood pressure. It can improve sleep and reduce chronic pain and stomach problems. Psychotherapists use mindfulness to treat depression, anxiety, substance use problems, and other conditions.

You can work mindfulness into any activity. It doesn't have to be expensive or time-consuming. Try listening to music, having a meal with friends, or taking a walk. Pick up some flowers for your table, sit down and pet your cat or dog, or spend some time watching children play and laugh. All these things can reconnect you to the present.

S.T.O.P. Technique

The S.T.O.P technique is a simple mindfulness practice you can do in times of stress:

S: Stop what you are doing for a moment.

T: Take a breath. Focus on your breath flowing in and out.

O: Observe your thoughts, feelings, and physical state. Notice your thoughts and let them pass. Name your emotions. Notice how your body feels. How's your posture? Are you hungry or thirsty? Do you have aches or pains?

P: Proceed with something that will help you address the cause of your stress. Talk to a friend, eat a nutritious snack, or do some stretches.

Source: <https://staging.vnshealth.org/patient-family-support/health-library/practicing-mindfulness-to-relieve-caregiver-stress/>

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