

## Self-Care for Carers

### **Perspective**

Appreciate that your caring is invaluable, whether or not anyone else expresses appreciation.

### **You first**

The truth is you can't be an effective carer, if you don't first attend to your own basic needs. This is not being selfish, it's being effective.

### **Consider you own**

#### **1. Health**

- Do you have your own GP? Other health professionals as needed?
- Do you see him or her ?
- Are you looking after your own diabetes / weight / cardio risk factors / mental health etc?

#### **2. Nutrition**

- Do you eat regular meals?
- Are you providing for the older person while neglecting your own nutrition?
- Do you eat fruit and vegetables?
- Are you using drugs or alcohol to cope?

#### **3. Exercise**

- Can you at least get some regular walking in?
- What exercise do you need, to be your best?

#### **4. Social needs**

- Can you maintain important relationships?
- Who can you confide in?
- Who can you have some fun with?

#### **5. Recreation needs**

- Can you find some periods of peace and quiet?
- When was your last holiday?

#### **6. Sleep**

- Is your loved older person waking you at night?
- Is worry disrupting your sleep?

### **Families**

If family members help each other, it can greatly lighten the load.

Sometimes it can be frustrating when a sibling or other family member won't help with caring, even when politely asked. I've seen so many lovely families come to grief over this one.

Try to appreciate that everyone has had a different relationship with the older person, and different current life circumstances.

Try not to get too stressed about others, you have enough to focus on.

### **Knowledge**

Read up on the condition your older loved one suffers, as it will help you as a carer.

Access websites like Dementia Australia for wonderful help sheets etc.

Know what medications your loved one takes and why.

Knowledge is power.

### **Practicalities**

The care system might be stronger if it's not just you.

Community supports such as help with personal care (showering, dressing), in-home respite or day centre, might take some setting up, but many older people and their families find them helpful.

Start with a MyAgedCare assessment. Don't be alarmed that this necessarily means permanent residential aged care right away. In most cases community services are available.

As care needs grow, as they will, for example, in cases of dementia, anticipate that you will need to put more supports in place over time. Try to be realistic in your planning and not let matters get to crisis point.

### **More support**

The national number for the Carer gateway for counselling, coaching, support groups etc is 1800 422 737

Compiled by:

**Dr. Judith Raymond**

MBBS, FRANZCP, FPOA