

Care for caregivers

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(HealthDay)—Many of us will care for a parent at some point in our lives. If you're shopping or cooking for Mom or taking Dad to doctor visits, you're already a caregiver.

Caregiving is often in addition to raising kids, running your own home and holding down a job. That means your [stress level](#) can soar.

Besides having to make adjustments at work for time off, you may feel emotional, physical and financial strain. You may also start neglecting yourself, like not getting the rest you need or scheduling your own health checkups. This type of stress can lead to serious illness, depression and even [drug abuse](#).

That's why you need to protect yourself, starting now.

Drawing up an action plan can help you manage the responsibilities of caregiving. There may be classes at a local health center or hospital where you can get advice if Mom or Dad has a specific medical condition that's hard to control.

Look for services in your parent's community, such as local transportation to doctor visits, meals on wheels and [home care](#). One place to start is with your Area Agency on Aging. You can find local resources at www.eldercare.gov/

If you can afford to go without your salary for a time, ask your [human resources manager](#) if you're covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act. It protects your job while you take off up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave a year for family caregiving. This could be the time you need to handle your parents' affairs or move them to an assisted living residence.

Most important, find time for yourself, even if it's just 30 minutes a day to read a book or call a friend. Resist the temptation to go it alone—ask siblings or other relatives to help out so you can have some "me time."

Remember that [caregiving](#) can be rewarding for you and your loved one, as long as you keep yourself healthy and strong.

More information: The Office on Women's Health has more on how to recognize and manage [caregiver stress](#) and how to handle some of the costs of caregiving.

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