

10 TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS



Rosalynn Carter
INSTITUTE
FOR CAREGIVING





CARING FOR YOURSELF WHILE CARING FOR A LOVED ONE

Since its inception in 1987, the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving (RCI) has been committed to the promotion of caregiver health, skills, and resilience. We know how challenging it can be to care for another, and with more than 25 years in the caregiving field, we have learned how to help. This booklet is a compilation of our best advice, and we hope it will be useful to you on your caregiving journey.




**The caregiving journey
is not a sprint,
but a marathon!**



TIP #1

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

- 
- In order to **maintain your physical and emotional health over the long haul** of the caregiving journey, you must see about your own needs. Realize that the best way to care for another is to **take care of yourself FIRST**. If you become too stressed and experience “burn-out”, you will no longer be able to provide quality care for your loved one.
 - **Get your recommended immunizations, screenings, and check-ups.**
 - **Get enough sleep and eat a healthy, nutritious diet.** Engage in **activities that help you get rid of stress**. The time you take out of your busy day to exercise, garden, or to take a long, hot bath may make you feel better and **improve your overall attitude**.

TIP #2

BE INFORMED, GET EDUCATED

- **Knowledge is power.**
Seek out information on your loved one's condition.
- **Ask questions of doctors** and other health care providers that will help you understand the illness and what to expect. Be ready for these appointments with a written **list of your top three or four most important questions.**
- Take a notepad so you can **write down important information** that is shared with you. Accurate information can help you be a better caregiver.



Seek out other possible sources of information.

For instance, you may contact community agencies as many have programs to address disabilities and aging. The local public library and the Internet may be good sources of information. Caution: not all sources on the Internet are trustworthy, so be careful when exploring all websites.

One reliable resource is www.rosalynncarter.org.



Don't isolate yourself!

Time spent with others is vital to your health and well-being as well as supportive to your caregiving role.

Work to maintain your friendships and activities you enjoy doing.



TIP #3

GET CONNECTED WITH OTHERS

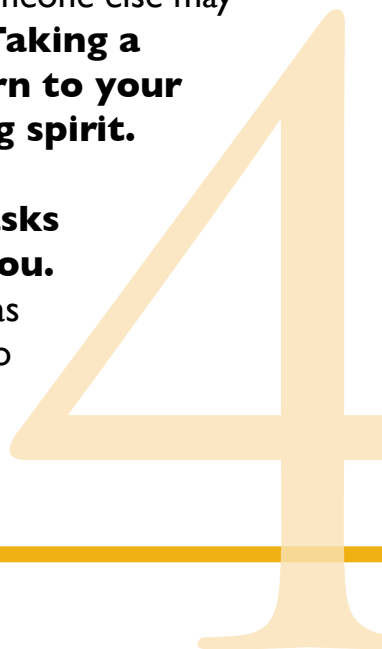


- **Connect and be honest with others** who may be partners in caregiving, including family members, friends, and professional care providers. **Address any concerns and feelings as they occur** – do not let negative emotions fester!
- Be ready to **ask for specific assistance** and be assertive in asking for help.
- Effective **communication**, mutual respect, and trust will **ensure that everyone is working as a team and benefit your loved one.**

TIP #4

RECEIVE WITH GRACE

- **No guilt allowed!** You are not supposed to do this caregiving journey alone.
- **Accepting help is empowering!** It allows you to spend time doing other activities that help sustain you. Friends, neighbors, church members, and others can be potential members of a care network that supports you and your loved one.
- Remember that no one can love your loved one as much as you do, but sometimes someone else may be able to provide care for them. **Taking a break can allow you to return to your loved one with a more loving spirit.**
- **Be prepared with a list of tasks that others can do to help you.** Let the helper choose a task such as cutting the grass, providing a ride to a health care appointment, sitting with your loved one while you run an errand, etc.



Allowing others to do what they can to help you is a win-win proposition.

Most people believe that it is better to give than receive.

By allowing others to help, you are giving meaning to their lives and making them feel needed and appreciated.




**“Now faith is the substance
of things hoped for,
the evidence of things not seen.”**
Hebrews 11:1 (KJV)



TIP #5

NURTURE YOUR FAITH AND SPIRITUALITY

- 
- Spirituality has been linked to **lower rates of depression and hypertension** and is a buffer to the stress in our lives.
 - Your **faith and spirituality can empower** and help you through difficult times.
 - Take time to **nurture your faith** – have a designated quiet time, attend religious services, engage in prayer and/or meditate – to enhance your faith and spirit.

TIP #6

ALLOW YOUR LOVED ONE INDEPENDENCE

- Everyone enjoys some independence. Even if it takes longer to accomplish a task, **allow your loved one to participate as much as possible.** In this way, you are allowing your loved one to maintain some control over his or her life.
- Respite care or time for yourself is good for both you and your loved one. **It is empowering for loved ones to give you a break from caregiving responsibilities.** You and your loved one deserve quality time both with and apart from each other.



**It is important to your loved one's self-esteem
to be able to help you – even in very small ways.**





TIP #7

BELIEVE THAT LAUGHTER IS THE BEST MEDICINE

- **Laughter** eases tension and stress, allows you to get rid of negative emotions, and actually boosts your immune system.
- Humor and laughter can take negative feelings and turn them into positive feelings.
Caregiving can be difficult, but **learning to laugh can help ease the pressure.**
- Seek out ways to improve your sense of humor. Laugh at unexpected mix-ups, read the comics, watch funny movies, tell jokes, send funny cards or emails. **Allow yourself and your loved one to be silly!**

TIP #8

LET GO OF SITUATIONS BEYOND YOUR CONTROL

- **Unexpected problems and challenges** are part of the caregiving journey.
- **It is easy to become overwhelmed when faced with multiple issues** related to caregiving. Don't try to tackle everything at once. Prioritize a list of problems and check them off one-by-one as you face each. When you review the list, you will see that you have made progress and can calmly work on the remaining problems.



**Remember that some outcomes
are beyond your control.**

You can be the best caregiver ever and still not slow or
alter the disease that has affected your loved one.



Talk about legal and financial issues with your loved one and family as soon as possible.

If you should become unable to care for your loved one, have a plan in place for their continued care. Planning ahead allows your wishes to be known and relieves others of the burden of trying to guess what you or your loved one would want done under certain situations.



TIP #9

PLAN AHEAD



- Laws differ from state to state, so you may want to **consult a local attorney or available legal aid to explain your legal options.** Make sure you understand your rights and those of your loved one.
- **Ask questions.** It is important that you and your loved one's wishes are clear and that necessary paperwork (such as living wills and other advance directives) are in place.

TIP #10

BE A CAREGIVER ADVOCATE

- When you become a caregiver for another, you quickly learn what is and what is not available in your local community to help you. You can **share with others on the caregiving journey who may have these same needs.**
- Group efforts, such as support groups, can be a strong voice for caregiver needs in the community, the state, and the nation. **Reach out to your community leaders and legislators** to keep them informed about your concerns.







Rosalynn Carter

I N S T I T U T E
F O R C A R E G I V I N G



Produced by the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving
Funded by the Mattie H. Marshall Foundation

EDITOR

Leisa R. Easom, PhD, RN

ASSISTANT EDITORS

RCI Staff