Caregiver’s Emotional First Aid Kit

1. Smile; how often we forget to do this simple act and how well it lifts our spirits.
2. Call someone who makes you feel good, especially if you haven’t spoken with him or her in a long time.
3. Have a bite of something sinfully delicious, while being conscious of your own dietary limitations. When was the last time you treated yourself to a snack?
4. Take a bubble bath, once you make sure that your loved one is safe and secure; nothing expresses caregiver self-care better than a leisurely bubble bath.
5. Read, pick up that novel, or reread that motivating poem. When was the last time you turned off the television, turned down the phone, and read something nice? (This tip goes very well with number 3.)
6. Get a massage. It’s like taking a mini-vacation; it will relax you and relieve the tension you build up every day.
7. Buy yourself some flowers. You deserve them, and the sight and smell of something beautiful and fragrant will give you a reason to smile.
8. Take a walk at a pace that allows you to feel the wind washing over you.
9. Go shopping and buy something just for you; something to make you feel special.
10. For those with a computer - go online. You can explore different places, find new friends, and learn new things. Make the Internet your getaway even when you can’t get out of the house.

Adapted from www.caregiver.com, Inc. 1995-2008
Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) aren't just a nuisance – they can cause serious health problems.

A urinary tract infection happens when bacteria in the bladder or kidney multiply in the urine. Many elderly are unable to express when they are experiencing the symptoms of a UTI. Caregivers should have their loved one checked out for a UTI if the following symptoms suddenly appear:

- Confusion, or delirium-like state
- Agitation
- Hallucinations
- Other behavioral changes
- Poor motor skills or dizziness
- Falling

Sometimes, these are the only symptoms of a UTI that show up in the elderly - no pain, no fever, no other typical symptoms of a UTI. These symptoms often have been mistaken for changing stages of dementia when they really are UTIs. Caregivers need to recognize that sudden behavior changes are not normal. The above symptoms may be covering up the most common symptoms of a UTI, which may not even show up at all in an elderly person:

- A burning sensation upon urination
- Strong need to urinate, even immediately after urinating
- Foul-smelling urine
- Bloody, pink, or cloudy urine
- Pressure or pain in the middle of the back
- Low-grade fever
- Night sweats, shaking, or chills

According to the National Institutes of Health, the following conditions make the elderly more susceptible to UTIs than younger people:

- Diabetes
- Urinary retention (unable to empty the bladder, even if your loved one has just used the bathroom)
- Use of a urinary catheter
- Bowel incontinence
- Enlarged prostate
- Immobility (for example, those who must lie in bed for extended periods of time)
- Surgery of any area around the bladder
- Kidney stones

UTIs can lead to a condition called sepsis, a potentially life-threatening bloodstream infection. That's why caregivers must speak to their loved ones’ doctors to find out what else may be done to help clear up regular UTIs.

People with incontinence are more at risk for UTIs because of the close contact that adult briefs have with their skin, which can reintroduce bacteria into the bladder. Some recommendations to help reduce this risk include the following:

- Change the briefs frequently
- Encourage front-to-back cleansing
- Set reminders/timers for those who are memory-impaired to try to use the bathroom regularly
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Add regular cranberry juice to help eliminate any UTI that already exists or add cranberry pills. Do NOT use cranberry juice or pills if your loved one has a family history of kidney stones or if your loved one is on blood-thinning medications, such as warfarin.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol, because these irritate the bladder.

If you think your elderly parent might have a urinary tract infection, see your doctor right away.

Source: Adapted from agingcare.com, May 18, 2011.
Maintaining Dignity

The concept of dignity is a very important one in understanding Alzheimer’s, particularly in maintaining respect for someone who has the disease. Just as the smoothly functioning collection of neurons we call the normal brain creates a mind and produces a personality, so damage to these cells produces changes in the mind and personality. The confusion, the memory loss, the agitation, even the striking out at loved ones and the eventual loss of recognition of spouses and children are a direct result of damage to specific cells within the brain. At times, the person we used to know appears to vanish.

By recognizing that this is the direct result of physical damage, we can respect people with Alzheimer’s, preserve their dignity and appreciate them for who they were before the disease attacked them.

Adapted from, Alzheimer’s Disease: Everything You Need to Know, Dr. William Molloy and Dr. Caldwell, 2003.

Convincing a Loved One To Wear Adult Products

“My parent won’t wear adult diapers and it drives me nuts!”

Therefore the first thing I suggest to the caregiver in question is that he or she practice the following exercise. I suggest that they say, out loud, "I will not use the word 'diaper' in front of my parents unless I'm talking about a baby." Repeat as many times as needed, but get it down pat.

This may seem like nitpicking, but please, call it a brief. A pad. Anything you want. Just make the word adult sounding and respectful, and you’ll have mastered tip one on how to get your parent to wear incontinence protection. I ask you to do this not only for the elder, but yourself. Using respectful words will help keep your brain wired correctly, reminding you that you are caring for an adult who deserves to be treated as such, no matter what his or her disabilities.

Adapted from an article by Carol Bradley Bursack, agingcare.com, July 2011.
Easy Ways to Improve Your Mood

How you handle situations impacts your attitude, your happiness and your quality of life. Here are some tips for looking at the "glass half-full."

**Attitude:** Caregiving is stressful, time-consuming and depressing, but you have a choice as to how to approach the day. Life throws us many curve balls, but the one thing you can control is your attitude.

**Focus on the love you have to give:** People seek and enter relationships wanting to be loved. But do you love yourself? You can't expect others to love and respect you if you don't love and respect yourself.

**Breathe:** Consciously focusing on your breathing and taking deep breaths can relieve stress and increase relaxation immediately. Sit back. Place one hand on the abdomen and one hand on the lower ribs. Practice filling up those areas with air. Control your breathing by breathing in for 3 to 5 seconds, hold for the same amount of time, and then exhale the air out through your mouth slowly. Do this for 3 minutes and you will feel the stress melt away.

**Have a shoulder to cry on:** Whether it's someone to remind you that you're doing a good job, or a little advice on an impossible situation, we all need someone to rely on during tough times.

**Face fear head on:** We need to find a way to embrace these changes or at the least accept them. Hope is something we create. It's critical that we nurture hope in our lives.

Adapted from article by Marlo Solitto, agingcare.com

Mental Health Tips for Social Distancing

As we enter this new and unprecedented phase of the pandemic, we are inundated with guidelines about how to keep ourselves and our families healthy and virus-free. Yet a key item on the list—social distancing—poses unprecedented challenges to our mental and emotional well being, and requires consideration.

**Here are 4 tips to maintain your mental health while social distancing:**

1. **Social distancing does not mean emotional distancing; use technology to connect.** There are so many tech tools to help make social distancing easier. Zoom, Skype, or Facetime allow you to video chat with family and friends, almost having the same in-person interaction feelings!

2. **Exercise and physical activity, daily if possible.** For all of us, young and old, regular physical activity is important for staying healthy! Regular physical activity can help reduce your feelings of stress and anxiety.

3. **Positive family time—working to counter negativity.** Remember, as of today, it’s okay for small groups of ten people or fewer to still spend time together. Make sure to wash your hands and wipe down surfaces before and after spending time together.

4. **Focused meditation and relaxation.** Relax your body often by doing things that work for you- take deep breaths, stretch, meditate or pray, or engage in activities you enjoy.

Adapted from seniorhelpers.com Senior Care, Only Better Blog
Critical Items We All Need!

- **Paper Towels**
- **Disinfecting Spray**
- **Disinfecting Wipes**
- **Facial Tissues**
- **Liquid Antibacterial Hand Soap**
- **Toilet Paper**
- **Wet Wipes**

Tips for the Month of July

- Your loved one’s clothes’ closet and drawers may contain too many items. Remove excess clothing. Some choice is good. It gives him a sense of control. Too many choices can be overwhelming and upset him.

- Your loved one may be more apt to participate in games if you don’t keep score. Just play for the fun of it.

- Dressing another adult can be quite a chore. If your loved one is a lady accustomed to panty hose, you may want to opt for knee-high hose instead. Also clothing made of soft, stretchable fabrics that is easy to remove and care for is a must when dealing with incontinence.

- If hallucinations consist of unfriendly people that frighten or upset your loved one, try being his hero. Open the door and tell the unfriendly people to leave. One caregiver says she just shoos them out whenever they’re a problem. Then she quickly suggests she and her loved one enjoy some ice cream!

- If your loved one does not eat well at meals or has trouble sitting still long enough to eat a good meal, keep nutritious snacks in view all day. Make sure they are snacks that won’t spoil and have them where he can see them and get them easily.

- Avoid using patterned tile flooring as it could cause confusion and uneasiness. Your loved one may feel unsure and off-balance walking on it.

- Putting bells on doors might help make your life easier. Bells on the bedroom door can signal you if your loved one gets up during the night. Bells on outside doors help if he is a wanderer and a master at opening locked doors.

- Big is not always better. Large rooms, large crowds, large television sets can present problems for some people with dementia.

- A small blackboard is ideal for posting daily messages. Try it for writing answers to the most frequently asked questions.

Adapted from: Lyn Roche, *Coping with Caring*, Elder Books, 1996.
Tips for Traveling

(Editor’s note: It’s best to limit travel during the current pandemic, but if you do travel, the article includes helpful tips for planning a trip with persons with dementia.)

- Consider the person’s stage of dementia. As a caregiver, you know your family member’s capabilities. Trust your judgment and experience. Try to gear your expectations and plans to your family member’s skills. Plan ahead, anticipating delays, changes in schedules, weather, and your family member’s needs.
- Consider any physical impairments that might affect travel. How far can your family member walk? If visually impaired, you will need to provide your arm as a guide or escort. If your family member is hearing impaired, be sure his hearing aid is turned on to an appropriate volume and bring extra batteries.
- Keep your plans simple. Avoid fast paced schedules or connecting flights. The fewer the changes, the less likely your family member will become agitated.
- Bathrooms. Schedule extra bathroom stops and consider protective briefs. Enlist the help of a friend or family member (who is the same sex as the person with AD) to accompany you to the airport or bus station to assist with bathroom needs.
- Pack lightly. It will be important for you to have a hand free to escort your family member. If you have packages or need several suitcases, consider shipping them in advance.
- Consider travel time. How long can the individual sit in one place? Does your family member need to roam? Does your family member function better at certain times of the day?
- Never send the patient alone on a plane, especially with a connecting flight or on a bus with multiple stops. Flight attendants and customer service representatives are not responsible for watching your family member.
- Alert customer representatives of your special needs. Alert hotel staff if wandering is a problem. Ask restaurant staff what appetizers and meals can be prepared quickly and if they could put a rush on your meal. If flying, ask to board the plane early to avoid rushing, however, do not give them cause for alarm - airlines can deny seating for someone they believe will be disruptive to the flight.
- Food! Glorious food! Schedule plenty of breaks and time out for snacks. Try to maintain meal times.
- Bring along familiar activities. Pack a few magazines, a deck of cards, a wallet or purse to rummage through, or other activities that your family member enjoys at home. This will help to distract him from the change in environment and help to calm him by providing familiar events.
- Be consumer savvy. Some airlines may provide a special rate for an escort for a disabled person. Be sure to inquire about these special deals.
- Carry emergency contacts and phone numbers with you and on your family member.

Courtesy of Greater Pittsburgh Chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association, Reprinted with permission.
Losing The Sense of Time

When a person with dementia makes a false accusation it is actually a function of the disease, and not with the intention of being hurtful to you. I learned how confusing time can become to a person living with Alzheimer's. My mother had reversed the seasons in her brain. Just so you know, this happened hundreds of times. She would insist she needed a coat when it was hot, and insist no coat was needed when it was cold.

I had to develop a daily routine to bring a sense of order and time to my mother's life. To the degree possible we tried to do the same exact things, in the same exact order, and at the nearly exact time each day. This really paid off big. My mother was always less confused after we added a consistent routine to our lives.

When my mother would say, I'm hungry, I'm starving, instead of correcting her and telling her she just ate, or couldn't possibly be hungry, I started looking her right in the eye, smiling, and then saying, okay give me a few minutes and then we will eat. Pretty simple solution, huh? It worked. And no, we didn't eat in a few minutes, instead she forgot she was hungry.

Don't leave a person living with dementia alone - even for a short period of time, as it is usually meaningless when you say you will return in 10 minutes. Help the person living with dementia to regain a sense of time by reminding them often, each day, of the date, time, and season.

Adapted from alzheimersreadingroom.com, Bob DeMarco, March 24, 2017.

When Your Loved One Seeks Constant Attention

Here are some concrete suggestions for when you feel like you can’t get a minute to yourself:

* Try to arrange your furniture so that you can sit at the computer (or wherever) and your loved one can see you. If he/she says where are you, spin around, smile and say softly, “I am right here.” Less words are better. "I am right here"... period. That is what she wants to know isn't it?
* Pets often work well. They seem to help persons with dementia feel calmer and happier.
* Involve your loved one (and yourself) in exercise whenever possible. Exercise is mood changing. You release endorphins, burn off calories, and the benefits to your heart, blood pressure, cholesterol -- and brain, are well known. You feel better, you are happier. Plus, your loved one might start taking naps after the exercise.
* Perhaps your loved one would enjoy doing jigsaw puzzles or word finds, or coloring or painting. Many people like to look at photo albums or magazines. Turn on some calming music, too.

It's hard, but try to put a "positive" vibe into “Alzheimer's World.” Positive creates more positive!

Adapted from alzheimersreadingroom.com, Bob DeMarco, June 19, 2017.
DRINK UP!

What happens when a person is dehydrated? Health problems include: increased confusion, urinary tract infection, constipation, incontinence, decreased metabolism, headaches, daytime fatigue, intensified arthritis pain, and decreased functioning. That’s quite a list of symptoms, and both parties suffer the repercussions. So let’s talk about ways to get someone to drink up!

Placing a pitcher of water beside their bed or a cup of water in front of them isn’t enough. A person with dementia often loses his sense of thirst or is unable to tell you he is thirsty. Again, apply the concept that they only know what they see. You are more likely to create the thirst sensation by pouring ice-cold well water in front of him and adding verbal cues to stimulate his thirst. You might say, “I’m parched!” or “Let’s wet our whistles” and even, “It’s hot today.”

The person may not be able to start a motion. If he has a blank look and doesn’t pick up the glass, this is your cue to put your hand over his hand and kick start the motion.

Can they see the water in the glass? If you use Styrofoam cups, individuals probably cannot see anything in the cup. Try see-through colored glasses so the drink becomes Kool Aid to a person who doesn’t like to drink water. You can also put the liquid in a McDonald’s cup with a lid and straw and pretend they are drinking a soda.

If someone is dehydrated or malnourished, he will function at a lower level. Possibly, he will display behaviors similar to those associated with Alzheimer’s disease, but not actually have the disease at all.

Serving warm liquids in the morning increases metabolism, and offering liquids after every activity is not only a way to break, but also to hydrate. Of course, he wants coffee, coffee, and coffee . . . And 30 seconds after he drinks his coffee, he wants another cup. Use the short-term memory to your benefit and say over and over again. “The coffee is coming. I just started it.” This gives the person hope that what they want will happen a little bit later. Caffeine dehydrates people, so you might want to serve decaffeinated coffee diluted with water.

Of course, you have to pick your battles. If he grows upset because you won’t give him more coffee and he refuses water or other liquids, by all means let him enjoy his coffee. The same could apply to a person who just wants to smoke a cigarette or to a diabetic person who wants something sweet. It’s important to value each person’s quality of life.

Adapted from Creating Moments of Joy by Jolene Brackey, 2003, pages 206-208.