

Taking Care of the Dementia Caregiver with Easy Holistic Health Approaches

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Being a caregiver can be full of love and rewards. However, there are times it can be sad, frustrating, or stressful. If you are a caregiver it is important for you to refill your well. You need care yourself. There are many ways to take care of yourself, and to stay well mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. There are simple holistic ways to care for yourself, and there may be times you need care from others. Holistic health care is becoming more popular as research continues to demonstrate many of its benefits for natural health, prevention, and wellness. Holistic health care blends what is commonly referred to as Complementary/Alternative Medicine, Prevention and Wellness into mainstream health care.

Experiencing stress is a normal part of life. It can become challenging when a demand of a situation seems too much or more than we can handle and if we experience it frequently. Caring for a loved one who has a chronic condition that will likely progress can keep you juggling many activities, and may bring up many feelings and emotions, as well as grief and loss.

Fortunately, there are ways to relax and feel more calm and peaceful by inducing the Relaxation Response, a term coined by Herbert Benson, MD, which is the antidote of the Stress Response. It can calm the mind and body and lower physical, emotional pain, anxiety, depression, effects of trauma, and insomnia. It can slow the breath rate, lower physical tension, relax muscles, and reduce blood pressure. It can calm brain activity, increase attention and decision-making functions of the brain, and can positively affect gene activity that are the opposite of those associated with stress, and can prevent disease or illness.

A simple way to induce the relaxation response is to take a slow deep breath in, hold for a moment, then slowly exhale. When breathing in allow your abdomen to expand outward, or away from your body, and when you breathe out, allow your abdomen to come back toward your body. This is known as diaphragm breathing, abdominal breathing, or belly breathing.

Developing a regular daily meditation or relaxation practice can help you feel more peaceful, better able to cope, and has many health benefits.

While meditation, relaxation, and guided imagery can induce the relaxation response, activities such as going for a walk, gardening, cooking, or engaging in creativity can connect you with this calm and peaceful state. Any activity can do this as long as it is

pleasurable and brings you into the present moment, not thinking about the past or future.