



## Aging Wisely With Linda

Consultations/Consulting • Counseling/Coaching  
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## Caregivers of Family Members: Why is Self-Care a Challenge?

Why is self-care a challenge? This is a question I often ask of caregivers. I get a variety of excuses of why a caregiver is not caring for themselves and giving 100% of their time caring for others. To be honest, the majority are doing it out of love, but for some, it is out of necessity and/or obligation. The cost of care is expensive. For some, they have the resources but don't want to spend them. For others on the other end of the spectrum, they have not investigated government or community programs for low income.

There is another reason some people “over-care” and that is they are avoiding something in their own life, like a struggling marriage, a career that is not fulfilling, or wanting so much for a parent or the other person to finally say “I love you” or “I appreciate you”. If this is you, send me an email and I will try to direct you to a therapist or a support group as soon as possible.



In reality, some of the self-care activities don't have any cost other than time. If you, as a family caregiver, took just 10 to 15 minutes twice a day on some of the activities below, you would probably extend your life, sleep better and give better care to your family member. In one recent study, I found, it said that "care receivers" lived longer with caregivers who practiced mindfulness exercises. So, you not only extend your life but also that of your loved one when self-care is practiced.

### Self-Care Activities

1. Daily Meditation (2 times a day). Find a reading, a podcast, CD, or daily meditation sent from a subscription such as the Daily Word. These do not have to be religious, but sometimes spirituality can really boost your energy when you can give over your burdens to a higher power.
2. Another daily activity that works is to keep a "gratitude journal" where at the end of each day you think of one thing you are grateful for and you write it down. The sheer cathartic action of writing can be healing in itself. This helps you keep a balance in life and know that there is something, even if small, in every day to be thankful for.
3. Breathwork. Again this is something that can be done in your twice a day activities or at night when you are struggling to get a good night's sleep. I have a link to Dr. Andrew Weil's breathing exercises at the end of this newsletter. Also, many organizations such as Lamorinda Village, near San Francisco, California, have weekly classes where you spend up to one hour with an experienced leader. These are mostly free and open to everyone. Breathwork is known to improve lots of medical challenges and it can be very relaxing.
4. Exercise with mindfulness in mind. That means when you are taking your short walks alone or with your care receiver, you look for the "awe" in nature, your neighborhood, or in the skies. Focus on the beauty around you. Forest bathing can rejuvenate your life as well, but this takes a little more time and might require that you find a sitter for your family member. I have a book that can help with this activity listed under resources this month. Practicing yoga or Tai chi can also empty your mind, increase your flexibility and relax your body. So, this could help keep you strong, improve your balance and prevent you from injury while caregiving.



Even if you are doing self-care and trying to be the caregiver your family member needs and wants, remember that no one can do this work 24/7 without burning out. When this happens, you will know it. Listen to your body and mind and look to outside supports from day care to memory care or assisted living. Look before you are burned out. That means you will have resources when the time comes.

**Affirmation: “I care for my mind and body; I listen to what I need in quiet times.”**

**Resources:**

Book: [The Joy of Forest Bathing by Melanie Choukas-Bradley](#)

[Dr. Weil’s Breathing Exercises](#)