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Caring for Others Without Losing Yourself

Caregiving is a reality for millions of Americans. It may mean helping an aging parent get to appointments, supporting a spouse through an illness, caring for a child with additional needs, or regularly helping a friend or relative who can't manage everything on their own.

Recent research shows just how demanding these responsibilities can be. The [2026 NAMI-Ipsos Workplace Mental Health Poll](#) found that caregivers reported significantly higher rates of burnout than non-caregivers (61% vs. 49%). Caregivers were also more likely to report concerns about their stress levels, work-life balance, and mental health.

For people in the "sandwich generation" – those caring for children while also helping older relatives – the strain can be especially significant. NAMI found that 52% of these caregivers had felt so overwhelmed that it was difficult to do their jobs, and 37% had considered quitting because of work's impact on their mental health.

The Work Behind Caregiving

Caregiving isn't limited to hands-on care. It can include researching treatment options, arranging transportation, managing medications, handling finances, making phone calls, coordinating schedules, or simply being the person someone turns to when something goes wrong.

For many caregivers, those responsibilities add up to a significant amount of time. A July 2026 report from AARP and the National Alliance for Caregiving found that [more than 51 million Americans provide care to someone age 50 or older](#). On average, these caregivers spend 26 hours each week providing care and have been doing so for five years. Both figures have increased since 2020.

The intensity of caregiving is increasing, too. The same research found that 44% of people caring for adults age 50 and older provide high-intensity care, which can include greater numbers of caregiving hours and help with more complex tasks. Nearly one in four is caring for someone with a memory issue or form of dementia.

Recognizing Caregiver Stress

When you're focused on someone else's needs, it can be easy to overlook what caregiving is doing to your own well-being. Stress may show up as exhaustion, irritability, difficulty concentrating, disrupted sleep, worry, or simply feeling as though there is never enough time.

[Current research suggests these pressures are common](#). AARP and the National Alliance for Caregiving reported in October 2025 that 39% of family caregivers nationally experience high emotional stress related to caregiving. One in five caregivers reports being in fair or poor health, while nearly one-quarter says they have difficulty caring for themselves.

Recognizing these signs does not mean you aren't capable of caring for someone. It may be a signal that the responsibilities you're managing are beginning to exceed the time, energy, or resources you have available.

Make Room for Your Own Needs

- **Protect the basics.** Prioritize regular meals, movement, hydration, sleep, and your own health appointments when possible.
- **Take small breaks.** Even brief periods away from caregiving responsibilities can create space to recharge.
- **Stay connected.** Make time for people and activities that remind you that caregiving is one part of your life, not your entire identity.
- **Ask for specific help.** Rather than simply saying, "I need help," ask someone to pick up groceries, make a phone call, provide transportation, or take over a particular task.
- **Look for available resources.** Explore community programs as well as benefits your employer may provide, such as an employee assistance program (EAP), mental health benefits, flexible scheduling, caregiver resources, or leave options.

Workplace flexibility may be particularly valuable for employees balancing these responsibilities. In the 2026 NAMI-Ipsos poll, 95% of caregivers said flexible scheduling for caregiving needs was important to their mental health and well-being. Eighty-six percent said a caregiver support group or employee resource group was important.

You Need Care, Too

It is possible to love someone deeply and still feel tired, frustrated, worried, or overwhelmed by the responsibility of caring for them. Caregiving can be rewarding while also placing real demands on a person's emotional, physical, and financial well-being.

An October 2025 AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving report found that [nearly half of family caregivers experience at least one negative financial impact from caregiving](#). The research also found widespread emotional stress and health challenges among caregivers, illustrating how the effects of caregiving can reach well beyond the care itself.

The goal isn't to become a caregiver who never feels depleted. Recognize your limits, pay attention to your own health, and seek support when you need it.

Caring for yourself won't remove all the challenges of caregiving. But making room for your own physical and emotional well-being can help make caring for others more sustainable and help ensure there is still room in your life for you.

Book Review | Finding Balance While Caring for Others

Caring for someone you love can be deeply meaningful, but it can also bring stress, uncertainty, and responsibilities that are difficult to balance with everyday life. In [*The Mindful Caregiver: Finding Ease in the Caregiving Journey, 2nd Edition*](#), geriatric social worker Nancy L. Kriseman offers a compassionate and practical approach to caring for others without losing sight of your own wellbeing. Drawing on decades of experience working with older adults and their families, Kriseman helps caregivers navigate common challenges while building resilience.

Rather than presenting caregiving as something that must be handled perfectly, Kriseman encourages readers to set realistic expectations and recognize when they need support. From managing stress and family dynamics to advocating for a loved one and finding helpful resources, the book provides guidance for making caregiving more sustainable.

Book Highlights

Kriseman explores challenges caregivers face, including stress, changing relationships, family dynamics, resistance to care, and difficult decisions. She combines mindfulness with practical strategies to help readers recognize their own needs, understand what they can realistically manage, and respond to challenging situations with greater intention. The book also emphasizes building resilience, finding support, and maintaining a sense of self outside of caregiving.

A Key Takeaway

One of the book's central messages is that caring for yourself is part of caring for someone else. Caregivers can become so focused on another person's needs that their own wellbeing moves to the bottom of the list. Kriseman encourages readers to know their limits, ask for help, and let go of the expectation that they should manage everything alone.

Employees balancing caregiving with work and family responsibilities will appreciate the book's realistic and compassionate approach, while HR professionals and organizational leaders may gain a better understanding of the pressures working caregivers face. *The Mindful Caregiver* is a useful reminder that sustainable caregiving means supporting someone you love while still making space to care for yourself.

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