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HOLIDAYS AT HOME

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Caregivers need a time out: Make 'me time' a priority

Caregiving can be emotionally and physically draining. Yet, many of us spend our life providing care and taking time for others. We're parenting, caregiving for older parents or relatives, working and volunteering, but how often do we actually take time for us? Being a good caregiver includes taking time for yourself and finding ways to recharge your battery. This can also lead to a long and healthy life.

Being kind to yourself is a critical component to self-care. The American Heart Association recommends making a conscious decision to do something that you enjoy every day. Whether it is reading a book, exercising, or shopping without distraction, taking time for you is good for your mind, body, and soul.

Aim for spending at least 10 minutes a day on you. You can start by thinking about the things you know are good for you — getting enough sleep, eating a healthy diet, exercising, managing stress, and practicing relaxation. You can also make a "To Do" list to help you prioritize time for you in your busy day.

Taking a guilt-free break to relax is important. When the body can naturally unwind itself, you tend to sleep better, have more energy, and a stronger immune system.

It is also mentally healthy to take breaks from your routine. Slipping away does not have to be for extended periods. It can mean going to your bedroom with your door closed to sit, take a bath, or read a book uninterrupted. If it is difficult for people to leave you alone, leave the house to go for a walk, meet a friend for coffee, take a scenic drive, or run an errand.

Finding opportunities to connect with people, especially with those who are meaningful and make you laugh, is also a way to take care of yourself. Connection provides purpose and helps combat isolation and burnout. Laughter makes you feel good, reduces stress, lowers depression, and contributes to overall healthiness.

Taking time for you is not selfish. In fact, the opposite is true. If you are not at your peak, you cannot take care of yourself or others.

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