

**Caring Every Day:** Three words that family caregivers understand all too well. Every day you provide essential care and put your loved one's needs ahead of your own. Every day you try to balance the demands of caregiving with your myriad other roles. Whether you are caregiving full-time, part-time, or long-distance, your devotion to the needs of someone else does not come without a price; that price may be physical, financial, emotional, or all three.

Who cares for the family caregiver? That's a question we've all asked ourselves at some point. Unfortunately, the answer often is "no one." It is up to us to make the effort to do what we know we need to do to keep going. So often, what we want to do falls by the wayside.

Deep down you know that family caregivers need care, too, even as you ignore the signs of illness, exhaustion, or depression that you may be experiencing. You may not want to acknowledge your own needs. You may think that taking care of yourself means neglecting your loved one. In fact, the opposite is true. You provide an essential service, one that cannot easily be duplicated. The best way to ensure that you will continue to be there for your loved one is to take care of yourself.

**The Caring Every Day Campaign** was created by NFCA to make it easier for you to care for yourself and your loved one. The Campaign encourages you to take three steps every day that can make you more confident and comfortable in your caregiving, actually improve the care you provide your loved one, and make your life easier. **Three steps you can take each and every day:**

**Believe in yourself  
Protect your health  
Reach out for help**

*Caring Every Day*

Believe. Protect. Reach Out.



NATIONAL FAMILY CAREGIVERS ASSOCIATION

800/896-3650

[www.thefamilycaregiver.org](http://www.thefamilycaregiver.org)

NFCA is the nation's leading constituency organization for family caregivers. NFCA educates, supports, empowers, and speaks up for the more than 50 million Americans who care for loved ones with a chronic illness or disability, no matter what their age or diagnosis.

NFCA is grateful to all the generous corporations and foundations that are partnering with us in support of NFC Month 2005 and **The Caring Every Day Campaign.**

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1, 2, 3

Steps 4 Family  
Caregivers

Healthful Ideas  
for Family Caregivers  
From NFCA

## 1 Believe in Yourself

One of the most important things you can do to help your loved one is to believe in yourself. No one knows your loved one better than you do. No one can advocate for your loved one the way you can. **Trust your instincts.** Let your inner voice guide you.

A good place to put this into action is in healthcare situations. When talking with doctors and other healthcare professionals, you *do* have a right to ask questions. You just need to believe that and to **project the authority that comes with inner confidence.** Just stay focused on clear goals and don't let anger or stress get in the way of good communication.

During times of crisis we tend to second-guess ourselves, but that is the time we most need to heed our inner voice. **Remember, more often than not you make good decisions.** One of the best things you can do during a crisis is to build your strength by drawing on the strength of others. Friends can bolster your confidence and help you organize your thoughts. Believing in yourself doesn't mean you have to do everything by yourself. Rather, it means trusting your instincts.

Decision-making is really about risks, choices, and the opportunity to make things better. A decision may not be best for everyone simultaneously, but it has to be made. Once you have made your decision, accept that you have done the best you can and move on. While others may have different opinions, they are not walking in your shoes. Believe in yourself!

## 2 Protect Your Health

You have heard it before: If you are not in good health, you won't have the physical or emotional strength to help your loved one. No truer words have ever been spoken.

**Family caregivers are especially at risk for stress and depression.** It's easy to become so consumed with your loved one's medical needs that you neglect your own, but, by doing so, you are actually putting your loved one's health at risk. Who would take care of your loved one if you became incapacitated? Recent studies have demonstrated that the chronic stress experienced by family caregivers actually accelerates aging.

**Taking care of yourself does not mean you are neglecting your caregiving duties.** If anything, making sure you are in good shape will only help you be a better caregiver. **Healthy habits can fit into a busy family caregiver's day.** Just spending a few minutes stretching or deep breathing can make a difference. Similarly, walking, even if it is just a couple of turns around the living room or up and down the stairs, is good exercise, especially if it gets your heart rate up. Sure, half an hour on a treadmill is more complete exercise, but taking a few minutes here and there for focused exercise several times a day can help you stay in shape, without adding more stress to your life. Remember, too, that today it is easier than ever to eat nutritious meals, even when you are on the go. Finally, take a vitamin supplement every day. This simple step goes a long way toward helping you stay healthy.

## 3 Reach Out for Help

It's been said that it takes a village to raise a child. Family caregiving, too, is a job for more than one person. **Asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.**

**Before you can ask for help, however, you must admit that you need it.** This may not be easy, especially when you have grown accustomed to being the one who *provides* the assistance, not the one who receives it. But there are times when the only way you can help your loved one is to help yourself first.

Start by making a list of all your caregiving-related tasks. Do you need someone to run simple errands for you? Could you use advice on financial matters? Identifying specific needs and tasks will enable you to reach out to others more effectively, and to **be receptive to help when it is offered.**

Next, find the emotional support that will help keep you going. Finding another family caregiver to bond with provides an outlet for sharing all your thoughts and feelings, even the dark ones, because another family caregiver is sure to understand. To reach out successfully, for emotional support or hands-on help, you must be willing to open up and share your story. This may be difficult for you, but the rewards can be tremendous.

Finally, **ask for the gift of respite:** the opportunity for dinner with a friend; a luxurious massage; or, ideally, some actual time away. First, however, **you have to believe you have a right to some personal time — and you definitely do!**