

# Mental Health for Caregivers

## Evidence-Based Strategies



### Cultivate Social Support

Caregiving can feel isolating at times. Some caregivers believe that tending to their own needs for support is indulgent. However, research clearly demonstrates that having social support and community connections reduces stress and lowers the risk of depression. Connecting with friends, family members, and support groups can also provide emotional validation and practical advice.

Tip: Having a regularly scheduled time to check in with trusted friends or relatives can offer a valuable outlet for sharing emotions and receiving needed support, helping caregivers avoid feeling overwhelmed or burned out.



*Social support is essential for managing stress.*

### Practice Mindful Relaxation

Constant demands on their time and energy can leave caregivers feeling depleted. The effects of stress are cumulative, so when we are continuously stressed, our ability to function is impaired across the board. Research shows that deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation aid in decreasing stress and anxiety and improving mood.

Tip: Find five minutes to sit quietly. Breathe in through the nose for a count of 4, hold the breath for a count of 5, exhale through the mouth for a count of 6, then rest for a count of 7 before repeating.



*Deep breathing helps the mind and body decrease anxiety and improve mood.*



## Express Yourself

Caregiving is emotionally demanding and can often invoke conflicting emotions. Research demonstrates that we benefit, both physically and mentally, when we articulate our emotions instead of holding them in.

Tip: Spend 10-15 minutes writing about how you feel. Instead of worrying about grammar or structure, focus on expressing your emotions as authentically as possible. Try to write at least once a week.

## Pet a Pet, Plant a Plant

Nature offers many outlets for supporting mental health. Science shows that sharing affection with a pet, tending to a garden, or just spending time outdoors can help protect the body from becoming overwhelmed by stress.

Tip: If you enjoy interacting with animals, prioritize spending time playing, cuddling, and giving focused attention to a pet. Doing so reduces blood pressure, lowers cortisol, and elevates positive mood.



## Consider Professional Help

Even the strongest, most experienced caregiver can benefit from an occasional visit with a professional therapist. Mental health counselors are trained to provide tailored strategies to manage anxiety, burnout, and depression.

Tip: Use a resource such as [psychologytoday.com](https://www.psychologytoday.com) to identify a counselor in your area. Many communities also offer resources specifically for caregivers, such as respite care programs.