

Tip Sheet # 31



Taking Care of My Own Health

Being a caregiver can take a toll on your health. It is not unusual for caregivers to put the needs of the stroke survivor first. Sometimes caregivers put off going to the doctor. Keep in mind, **the quality of care that you provide for the survivor depends on your physical and mental health as a caregiver.** Give yourself permission to look at your own health and to take care of yourself. Both the survivor and you depend on it.

What about taking care of my own health?

- It is alright to take care of yourself. **In fact, it is a MUST!** You will be a better caregiver if you take care of yourself.
- There are simple things you can do to take care of yourself. These are the things you have heard or read before.
 - Some kind of daily exercise is good for both your body and your mind. Take a walk or work in the garden. Do something active every day.
 - Eat foods that are good for you. Keep fruits or vegetables in the refrigerator for quick snacks.
 - Take your medicine and see your doctor for checkups.
 - Try to keep a regular sleeping schedule.
 - Set goals and create an action plan for better health. See **Skill-Building Tip Sheet #SB7 Goal Setting: Taking Care of your health.**
- Work on managing risk factors and lifestyle changes with the survivor. See **Tip Sheet # 3 Risk Factors for Another Stroke** and **Tip Sheet #4 Recommended lifestyle changes after stroke.** Helping the survivor with managing their risk factors and with lifestyle changes will also help your health as a caregiver. Work with the survivor as a team to promote healthy behaviors for both you and the survivor. **Tip Sheet #32 Keeping my energy level up** is also a good place to look.

- Emotions are a part of health! Schedule mental health breaks and downtime for yourself. See **Tip Sheet #27 Dealing with my own emotions while providing care** and **Tip Sheet #33 Keeping my own social life going**.
 - Talk with friends.
 - It is not unusual to feel discouraged or depressed at times. Let your friends know when you are down. Talk with people who can lift your spirits.
 - Go out with friends and arrange someone to stay with the survivor. See **Tip Sheet #26 Finding care while I am away**.
 - Spend a little time doing something you like to do.
 - Read, work with your hands, or take care of a pet.
 - Allow yourself a treat. Some people enjoy fresh flowers, an ice cream or even a small splurge from the grocery store.

How can I as a caregiver learn more about taking care of my health?

- There are many resources for learning more about your health.
 - The library has books and magazines.
 - People in support groups can share their ideas for making time to take care of yourself. **Tip Sheet 8 Where to find resources has a list of support groups**.
 - Your doctor's office may have booklets about taking care of your health.
 - Look for health fairs in malls or neighborhood centers.
 - If you use the computer, make sure the information you find is from a reputable source, like a hospital or WebMD.



When do I need to contact a professional about my own health?

- You should see your doctor or nurse for routine checkups.

- Try to stay up to date on your mammograms, eye exams, and dental visits.
 - Get a flu shot in the fall if advised by your doctor.
 - **Check your blood pressure regularly.**
 - Watch for refill dates on your medicines.
- Call your doctor or nurse if you have any signs of an infection.
 - Call your doctor or nurse if you are feeling overly tired, sad or anxious.
 - Call your doctor for any changes in your health. If you have symptoms that do not get better, call the office.
 - Don't neglect your emotional needs.
 - You may feel angry, helpless, guilty, or impatient. These are normal feelings.
 - If talking helps you, seek out a trusted friend, clergy member or counselor.
 - Call a professional if you have sadness that does not get better within a few weeks.

Where do I find a doctor for my needs?

If you do not have a doctor, you can use the following ideas to find one.

- Ask your stroke survivor's doctor.
- Talk with your friends or clergy.
- Physician referral line – Search the internet for hospitals in your area. Most hospitals have a “physician referral” phone number.
- If your hospital does not have a “physician referral” phone number, try the phone number listed for the hospital. Ask the operator for help.



Where can I find a dentist or eye doctor?

- Ask family members or friends who they would recommend for a dentist or an eye doctor.
- Search the internet for dental offices or optometrists.
- Check with local Universities that train dentists or eye doctors. They may offer free clinics or services for a reduced fee.

Where do I find more information about taking care of my health?

- Check with your local hospital for community health classes. Many classes are free or have a minimum charge.
- Search the internet for trusted health information. For example, the National Institutes of Health offer a variety of health information links: <https://www.nih.gov/health-information>
- The National Library of Medicine offers videos on a variety of health topics: <https://medlineplus.gov/videosandcooltools.html> Look at the following tip sheets in this notebook:
 - **Tip Sheet #3 Risk factors for another stroke.**
 - **Tip Sheet #4 Lifestyle changes for the stroke survivor**

These tip sheets have detailed information about lifestyle changes and risk factors for the stroke survivor. These lifestyle changes and risk factors can also apply to you as a caregiver. **Read through these tip sheet for ideas on how to improve your own health as well as the health of your survivor.**

Set goals and create an action plan for better health.

- **Skill-Building Tip Sheet #SB7 Goal Setting: Taking Care of your health.**

Also check out the Stress Management workbook too.

- **Skill-Building Tip Sheet #SB6. Stress Management Workbook for Caregivers and Survivors.**

Last, but not least... get regular checkups with your doctor for yourself. Taking care of yourself is very important.