

8 Ways to Be a More Optimistic Caregiver

Fill-in-the-blank: "Today I feel grateful for _____."

But if you'd like to learn how to cultivate more optimism in your caregiving life, you may be interested in these tips for creating positivity and building resiliency in the face of adversity.

1. Look for the Good

Author Catherine Pulsifer said, "To find optimism, look for the good things in life." This advice may be easier said than done, however it's important to help keep the negative thoughts at bay. Try making a list each day of things that are good in your life. Some caregivers shared that they were grateful for the little things like a cool breeze, a nap, or sunshine. When problems loom large, look for the small bright spots in your life.

2. Speak kindly – to yourself

Don't say anything to yourself that you wouldn't say to anyone else. Turning off the negative dialogue in your head can be a powerful tool to harness optimism. The first step is recognizing negative thoughts and reframing them in your mind. For example, instead of thinking, "This will never work," you might say to yourself, "I'll try again a different way." Positive thinking takes practice, and with time you'll notice fewer critical or negative thoughts popping into your mind.

3. Lean on positive people

Surrounding yourself with positive friends and family is helpful when trying to stay upbeat yourself. Helpful people you meet on the journey is inspirational. Seeing the positivity in others and involving them in your life can be powerful. "You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with," said the late Jim Rohn, entrepreneur, author and motivational speaker. Choose to spend time with those that give you energy and positivity, not people that take it from you. If getting together in person is not possible, connect online or join a supportive online community such as the [Caregiver Stress Relief community](#).

4. Find happiness through health

A healthy diet and exercise can go a long way to improve mood and maintain positivity in your life. Exercise can reduce stress, increase energy, and foster good sleep habits. Can't find 30 minutes a day to exercise? Break it up into three 10-minute chunks. With today's technology, you can find activities to get you moving. Eating well can also impact wellbeing and keeps your mind sharp.

5. Remember you are doing your best

It is a luxury to write and read and sit quietly to reflect on all that is happening. You are showing up when it matters the most. At times, you may have lost your patience, but that doesn't detract from all the other positives you have done.

6. Laugh to lighten your load

Not only does laughter make you feel good, its positive effects stay with you long after the

chuckling subsides. Research shows that laughter lowers stress hormones, relaxes muscles, improves mood, and eases anxiety. Make a list of funny events/little daily ones, and recall them.

7. Keep it simple

Sometimes, doing only what needs to be done – dishes, laundry, meals – can make the days less daunting. Don't set unrealistic goals for yourself. Pick one thing to accomplish and focus on that.

8. Take time for yourself

Whether it's a quick walk around the block or meeting a friend for lunch, taking a break from caregiving duties is important for your health and wellbeing. If you're able to take time off, it will be good for both you and your loved one. Develop a respite team to give you a break. Look to a family member, friend, or professional caregiver to give you a few hours to yourself so you can recharge and maintain an optimistic outlook. You might even plan to take some time off.

Caregiving can be rewarding, but no caregiver breezes through the journey without feeling some degree of negativity and hopelessness creeping in. By following tips to stay positive, you may be able to transition your outlook to one of optimism and gratitude for even the smallest positive things in life.

Caregiver Depression? Try This

If caregiving has you feeling overwhelmed or stressed you to the point you think you may actually be depressed, you're not alone.

One caregiver said, "When I get overwhelmed, it's because I'm not taking time for myself, so I'm learning to build time into the schedule of appointment, paperwork, chores, etc., just for me...specifically doing something that I like and I want and will help me."

Caregiving can be very rewarding, but it also can contribute to feelings of anxiety, isolation and guilt. If you believe you may be experiencing caregiver depression, take heart. Remember that exercise may work as well as antidepressant medications in easing symptoms of depression.

If you hate exercise or wonder how on earth you're supposed to find time for fitness during your hectic caregiving day, we have some tips to help. Try these approaches:

- **Pick an activity before you try finding time for it.** Many experts advise making fitness a priority by scheduling it on your calendar to ensure you honor your commitment. But it's easy to skip the workout if you hate exercising. To solve this problem, try choosing a fitness activity *before* you commit to exercising regularly. It's easy to find time for doing something fun.
- **Try different types of fitness activities to find the right fit.** Exercise is like shoes: you often have to try on several pairs to find the one that feels the best. If you find it boring to

walk every day, try signing up for an exercise class. If the idea of exercising with a group with other people puts you off, try popping a fitness DVD into your player at home. Keep trying out different types of fitness until you find something that fits your tastes.

- **Reach back into childhood for fun ideas.** What activities did you enjoy as a kid? Shooting baskets? Nature walks? Dance class? Treat yourself like a kid again by taking up an activity you haven't done for a long time. You may find it's just as fun today as you remember it being when you were a kid.
 - **Don't make things complicated.** Aim for 10 minutes a day of physical activity to start with. It can be something as simple as boogeying around the living room to your favorite music. Anything to get your blood pumping!
 - **Create a respite plan to ensure you have time for exercise.** If your loved one can't be left alone for even half an hour, you probably need some caregiving help. You will be a better caregiver if you keep yourself in good health.
 - **Exercise with your loved one.** Exercise benefits seniors in many ways. If you can't get away to exercise on your own, try finding a class or program that will allow both of you to get fit together. Or simply go walking.
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