



Taking Care of Yourself

For the patient's loved ones, caregiver, spokesperson, and advocate

Why Self-care Is Important

Tips and Ideas

I had to learn to take care of myself when my husband was in the ICU. It was overwhelming at times. My best advice to those going through hard days: Accept all offers of help.

~ Kathleen, family member

Once, a friend called to ask if there was anything he could bring to me while I was sitting and waiting in the ICU. I just wanted something green to eat.

~ Lee, family member

Why Self-Care Is Important

Your role in the care of your loved one is vital, for you supply comfort and support on many levels. And, if you are the patient's primary caregiver, spokesperson, or advocate, you may also be the person who talks with the medical staff and makes decisions on behalf of your loved one. The responsibility can feel overwhelming.

In your efforts to ensure the best care for your loved one, it is easy to neglect your own needs and well-being. But, if you become too tired or ill, you may not be able to fill your vital role.

Even though you may want to be at the bedside at all times, you must also take care of yourself. It is not a selfish thing to do – it is something you **must** do!

Tips and Ideas

Here are some tips that may help you take some time for yourself:

- Don't just sit there. Get some exercise and fresh air. Take a walk outside the medical center. The Montlake Cut, a scenic waterway that connects Lake Washington and Lake Union, is minutes away by foot. The University of Washington campus is across the street. Give the staff your cell phone number. You are only a call away. Or, ask the nurse if the unit has a pager you can use.
- If you feel anxious about leaving the building:
 - Try climbing the stairs for some exercise.
 - Check out the art on display throughout the building.
 - Visit the Healing Garden, on the south side of the building, 3rd floor level.
 - Spend a few minutes in the Gift Shop.
 - Have a snack in the Plaza Café, the hospital's main cafeteria.
 - Go to the Tea Room or one of the espresso stands.
- Bring in a CD player or iPod with speakers and listen to music both you and your loved one will enjoy.
- Lose yourself in a good book. Read aloud and then both of you can enjoy it. Or, find a spot away from the bedside and let a staff member know how to find you if you are needed.
- Go home, or where you are staying, and enjoy a long shower or relaxing bath.
- Eat healthy, balanced meals. But, feel free to "spoil" yourself with that special dessert sometimes.
- Drink plenty of water. There is a water fountain with cool, filtered water near each 5th floor elevator.
- Go out for a meal with friends.
- Talk to that special friend who supports you and makes you feel good after you hang up the phone. You do not have to talk to those who add to your stress.
- Keep a journal where you can express your feelings. Writing down your thoughts can be very freeing.
- Chaplains are on staff to support you and pray with you. Social workers are also there to help. Don't hesitate to ask to meet with one of them.

- When family and friends offer their help, take it! Keep a list of things that need to be done, such as grocery shopping, childcare, driving, housework, and yard work. When they offer, you will have some chores ready for them.
- Use www.carepages.com or www.caringbridge.org to keep family and friends informed. It can be tiring to answer the same questions and give the same updates to many people every day. CarePages and CaringBridge are a way for you to post information about your loved one and also receive messages back from your family and friends. See Section 8, “Services and Resources,” for more information about CarePages and CaringBridge.
- Pamper yourself! If you’re anxious about getting too far away from the ICU, there is a hair salon in the South Campus Center, just south of the hospital.
- Take your vitamins, and don’t forget your own medicines if you take them.
- If you knit or have a hobby you can do at the bedside, do it!
- Go ahead and use some of that lotion on yourself after you have given your loved one a “mini-massage.”
- Get some rest. Take naps when you can. You need your sleep!
- Take some time for yourself. It is one of the most important things you can do for your loved one. You will return refreshed and revived.