



# The Side Effects of CAREGIVING

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IF YOU SPEND ANY TIME AT ALL  
**LOOKING AFTER A LOVED ONE**,  
LIKE A PARENT, CHILD, OR SPOUSE,  
**YOUR OWN HEALTH** MAY NEED SOME  
TLC TOO. HERE'S HOW TO STAY  
WELL FOR THEM—AND YOURSELF.

**A**N OFTEN overlooked truth about caregiving: As hard and—let's face it—thankless as it can be, the people who do it are usually glad they can help. “When it comes to our kids or parents, most of us *want* to be there,” says pediatrician Kristin Ray, M.D., a researcher at the Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC. If there’s a problem, it’s not necessarily in the caregiving; it’s in how that commitment affects everything else.

Research shows that women are usually the ones in charge of their families’ health care, and in a recent survey conducted by HealthyWomen and GCI Health, almost 83% of women in caregiving roles said they were happy to be the ones calling the shots—and 55% said they were proud too.

However, only half of them are making time for their own health, like for screenings that can head off trouble down the road. That’s worrisome: “If you lose the captain, you’re going to lose the ship,” says Beth Battaglini, CEO of HealthyWomen, the nation’s leading nonprofit health information source for women. Plus, nearly 90% of the women in the HealthiHER survey described their stress levels as “moderate to high.” Almost 30% said they had been diagnosed with anxiety or depression. The pressure can make it nearly impossible to carve out time for their own care.

“With serious conditions like heart disease and diabetes on the rise, it’s critical that women do what’s necessary to ensure we can be here for our



**28%**

OF CAREGIVERS  
FEEL IN CONTROL  
OF THEIR OWN  
HEALTH—BUT 87%  
FEEL THEY HAVE  
THE POWER TO  
BE MORE SO.

families,” says Wendy Lund, CEO of GCI Health, a global health care communications company. While the women in the survey showed concern about things like diabetes and Alzheimer’s disease, those who weren’t making time for regular screenings worried more about everything, from their stress levels to their eating habits to whether they’d get cancer. That may be proof that focusing on your own health will lower your stress, not add to it. “It’s like women are sitting on a two-legged stool, and we constantly need to strike that balance to keep from falling down,” Lund says. “But by taking care of ourselves, we’re adding a third leg, making everything at work and home much easier to handle.”



**60%**

OF CAREGIVERS  
ARE VERY  
INFORMED  
ABOUT THEIR  
FAMILY HEALTH  
HISTORY.

Here are some strategies for getting yourself what you need for your health and wellness so you can best support the people you love:

### Know when the other stuff can wait.

Since caregiving is nonnegotiable, leave the dishes from time to time. Practicing self-care will give you more energy to deal with all the little slings and arrows of our health care system. “I have to exercise every day,” says Kasey Boehmer, a researcher and health coach at the Mayo Clinic. “I prioritize sleep. And I know that my social network has really helped to pull me through.”

### Truly talk to your doctor.

Visit [patientrevolution.org](http://patientrevolution.org) for tips on how to talk to your M.D. about your life beyond the paper gown. “If a doctor tells you to do something that’s too much of a burden, you’re not going to do it,” Boehmer says. “Conversation is your most powerful tool to get treatment that fits your life.” The Patient Revolution can help you determine the things that are most important for your doctor to know and tackle barriers that keep you from bringing them up.

### Get help in practical ways.

Nearly half of women caregivers in the HealthiHER survey said that asking for help only complicates things for them—and one in 10 doesn’t have anybody to turn to. Consider a concierge service like Wellthy, which holds clients’ hands through every aspect of caregiving, including legal, medical, financial, and housing-related issues. There’s

free software that can help you get organized, or you can pay for a care coordinator to work with you directly. It’s \$200 to \$300 a month (some employers offer it as part of a benefits package), but it can be cost-effective: Negotiating with insurance companies, as Wellthy does, can often save you money, says Lindsay Jurist-Rosner, who founded the company after years of helping her own mom with multiple sclerosis (some of her seed money came from HearstLab, a program that supports women-led companies from the company that owns *Prevention*).

### Find a source of emotional support.

Not only are support groups critical for a caregiver’s emotional health, but they’re also a rich source of local referrals and advice, says Jo McCord, a family consultant for the Family Caregiver Alliance in San Francisco. There are many general caregiver forums and listservs (try [caregiver.org](http://caregiver.org) and [caregiveraction.org](http://caregiveraction.org)), and on Facebook, you can look for groups caring for people who have the same condition and challenges as your loved one. Daughterhood Circles are a way to connect with other people caring for aging parents; find a Circle or learn how to start one at [daughterhood.org](http://daughterhood.org). As you commit to taking care of your mental and physical health needs, remember: Every step you take to care for yourself helps your whole family.



**One half**

OF CAREGIVERS  
WISH THEY HAD  
MORE SUPPORT  
WITH THE  
DECISIONS THEY  
HAVE TO MAKE.