

Taking care of *you*: A plan for the diabetes care partner

You are not alone

If you are caring for someone with diabetes, you are not alone. Millions of people today have diabetes. And that means that millions of people, like you, are caring for a loved one with diabetes.

Being a care partner for someone with diabetes can bring forth many feelings. You may feel stressed. You may feel frustrated. You may feel overwhelmed at times. At other times, you may feel angry. But you probably also feel rewarded. That's because the work of being a care partner is so important.



You matter too

Care partners often put their own needs and feelings aside. But to take good care of others, you need to take good care of **you**. It's like they tell you on an airplane: Put on your own oxygen mask before you help others with theirs.

As a care partner, you may think of yourself as "the healthy one." But caring for someone else can be hard on you. Care partners of any age are less likely than others to take care of their own health. They also may have trouble:

- Getting enough sleep
- Eating well
- Finding time for physical activity
- Finding time to make medical appointments for themselves



Think about whether any of these is true for you. If you find that some of them are, keep in mind that you need to look after yourself so you can help your loved one with his or hers. Your loved one has a care plan in place to take care of his or her diabetes. You need a care plan in place to take care of you. On the next pages are some things to include.

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A plan for managing stress

Many care partners may feel stressed by their role. But there is a lot you can do to manage your stress.

See your own signs of stress early

Signs of stress may include anger, sleep problems, or forgetfulness. If you see these signs, you can take steps to make changes right away, before you feel overwhelmed.

Figure out what is causing your stress

Maybe it's that you just have too much to do. Maybe it's that you feel that your loved one is not doing enough. Whatever your sources of stress, once you know what they are, it may be possible to find ways to reduce them.

Be clear on what you can—and cannot—change

We can't change others. We can only change ourselves. Trying to change another person will only increase your stress. Ask yourself, "What can I change in this situation? What do I have control over?"

Take action to change what you can

Once you figure out what you can change, take action. That in itself can reduce your stress.

Learn stress-reducing methods

Things like walking and deep breathing can reduce stress no matter what its source.



Replace a negative with two positives

We all have negative thoughts from time to time. But negative thoughts have a way of mounting up—and bringing us down. So try this: Every time you have a negative thought, replace it with two positive thoughts. For example, say you're thinking, "We're never going to have time to drive to the gym five times a week. This diabetes care plan is never going to work." Instead, think, "We can find ways to get more physical activity into our lives without going to the gym. We're trying hard with this plan, and we're going to make it work."

A plan for keeping up your health

As a care partner, you may spend a lot of time and energy taking care of your loved one's health needs. But that can cause you to neglect your own health. You need to have a plan to look after your own health care needs. Here are some steps you can take:

- Make an appointment for a physical check-up, and **keep** the appointment
- If medicines have been prescribed for you, be sure to take them as directed
- Find time to be active. Even light exercise such as walking, stretching, or dancing can give you more energy. Try to find an activity you both like so you can be active together



A plan for making time for yourself



You're likely to be a better care partner if you take time for yourself. Find something nice to do for yourself each day. Set aside "your time," and make sure you don't let anything else get in the way. Think about what you enjoy and make sure you take the time to do it, every day.

A plan for talking with your loved one

Most care partners and their loved ones feel more stress than usual in their relationship. They may have to make many decisions and changes together. And that may cause stress for you. It will help if you can be honest with each other about your feelings. You may want to:

- Take time out each day to talk about how each of you are feeling and coping
- Talk about the things that are causing you both stress
- Discuss choices you can make together
- Find new and more positive ways to talk with your loved one. For example, instead of saying, "You're not even trying to follow your meal plan," you can say something like, "Changing the way you eat can be really hard. What can we do together to make it easier?"
- Focus on what makes you grateful for each other

A plan for finding support

You might sometimes think that no one knows how you feel. But you are not alone. Other diabetes care partners share your experiences and your feelings. That's why support groups can be so helpful.

At a support group, you can share many things, including your feelings about being a care partner. And you can help others by listening to their feelings. You can also share tips that have worked for you and get tips from others.



Depending on where you live, it may not be easy to find a diabetes care partner group. One place to start is with your local chapter of the American Diabetes Association. You can also try the social services department of your local hospital. If they don't have a group yet, they may be willing to start one when you tell them how important it is. With so many people being diagnosed with diabetes these days, there are likely to be many people in your area who could benefit from such a group.

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Commitment to my health

Use this chart to help you decide on your wellness goals and plan how to get to the goals you choose.

What I will do	<i>Example: I will do deep breathing exercises for 5 minutes every day to relax.</i>
Goal 1: _____ _____ _____	Goal 2: _____ _____ _____
When will I start	<i>Example: I will start tomorrow.</i>
Goal 1: _____ _____	Goal 2: _____ _____
How will I start	<i>Example: I will start by looking up how to do deep breathing online.</i>
Goal 1: _____ _____	Goal 2: _____ _____
My barriers	<i>Example: I am always short on time.</i>
Goal 1: _____ _____	Goal 2: _____ _____
How I will overcome my barriers	<i>Example: I will take 5 minutes out of my lunch hour.</i>
Goal 1: _____ _____	Goal 2: _____ _____

For more information, visit Cornerstones4Care.com

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