As lifespans lengthen and the population ages, being a non-paid caregiver requires more attention than it ever did before. Many people find themselves sandwiched between caring for their children and their aging parents, pulling them in different directions — and wondering if they’re providing the quality care their loved ones need.

Is it even possible, with so many burdens to bear, to take care of number one: yourself? The answer, of course, is “yes” — provided you have the right resources, coping skills, and a strong support network.

“There’s never enough time in the day.”

A lot of the responsibilities that fall on this “sandwich generation” can cause stress or anxiety, especially given that most caregivers continue to work full-time jobs in order to support the family financially. Learning to take care of oneself becomes a vital tool when navigating these new waters. It’s essential that we stay healthy and mindful of the amount of work and stress we take on.

STAY ORGANIZED.

With the constant demands life puts on us, staying organized will make things that much easier. When you can easily access information in a hurry and your day-to-day life is in order, you’ll be better prepared should a crisis arise. Life is stressful as it is, so it’s the little things that can make all the difference.

Everyone has a different organization system that works well for them, but some helpful tips might be to file all paperwork related to your loved one, from medical records to a quick contact sheet with all of their providers, in color-coded folders you can easily access. You can buy (or create) a mail organizer to immediately parse out any incoming mail related to your loved one, bills, mail from your children’s schools, etc.

Pinterest is an incredible resource for finding organizational strategies for every room in your house, which can make both organization and clean-up take much less time — freeing up some daily bandwidth for you to take care of you. (Grab a cup of tea and really savor it. Watch your favorite movie. Soak your feet. You deserve it!)
STAY HEALTHY, AND BE KIND TO YOURSELF.

It's very easy for caregivers to feel guilty about taking care of their own needs — but whether it's getting that pedicure or hitting the golf course for a few stress-relieving swings, sometimes a little bit of selfish attention is the most selfless thing you can do for your loved ones.

Think of it this way: attending to your own physical and mental health will make you that much more capable of caring for those you love. Eat a delicious variety of healthy foods to get the natural energy you need to get through the day — if you lack the time to prepare them, there are many affordable delivery services that can automate your meal prep.

Also, be aware of your own body, especially aches and pains. Making excuses or delay getting treatment can turn a minor problem into a major health issue down the line. Being proactive and mindful about your own health can save you precious time and money on health costs later on. (By the way, this includes mental health — whether it's talk therapy, mindfulness practice, yoga, or even medication, there's no shame in getting the help you need during an often difficult and stressful time).

DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP — OR ACCEPT IT WHEN IT'S OFFERED.

We've all been there: we think we can do it all — and while we get pretty darn close sometimes, there are just too many layers of responsibility for us to handle alone. When things get overwhelming, don't be afraid to reach out for help. That could mean help with caregiving, or just with your daily obligations: cleaning, housekeeping, or shopping. Even something as simple as using services like Jet.com or Amazon Prime for monthly delivery of household staples can take an incredible load off your plate.

FIND SUPPORT IN FRIENDS AND FAMILY.

One thing is for certain: you're not alone taking on the role of caregiver. Lean on other family members or friends for support. It might not take all the stress away, but sometimes just venting or talking about your frustrations can help. Don't be afraid to delegate more responsibilities to your children, spouse, or siblings. It takes a village!

A local support group is another great option to build your support network. You'll find people going through similar situations, who can share helpful stories about what has and hasn't worked for them. They can also provide invaluable empathy and a listening ear for when your burden feels too big to bear. Sometimes all it takes is one key insight to help lighten the load.

TAKE IT ONE DAY AT A TIME.

You may (and hopefully will) experience days where everything feels easy. You're a superhero, capable of handling all your responsibilities smoothly and deftly. However, some days will be harder than others. Remember to take small moments when you can to relax and destress, especially during those difficult days. Whether it's just a few minutes jamming out to your favorite song, soaking up the sun, or watching an episode of Modern Family, those spontaneous breaks are sometimes just what you need to keep going and rejuvenate your spirit.

GREENFIELD SENIOR LIVING BEST PRACTICE

One of the best ways to relieve your stress as a caregiver is to choose a senior living community you can trust to address your loved one's individual needs — physical, emotional, and spiritual. Greenfield Senior Living staff treats your loved ones with the same personal attention we would give our own family members, and we know that part of a successful, holistic care plan is making sure all family members and caregivers are supported. That's why each of our communities plans its own family outreach programs and takes care to get to know you and your loved one.

Want to learn more about how Greenfield Senior Living can help you feel empowered as a caregiver? Contact Greenfield today!