

# Caring for the Caregiver

## A Journey to Caregiver Wellness

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# The late Rosalynn Carter:

There are only four kinds of people in the world:

THOSE WHO:

- have been caregivers,
- are currently caregivers,
- will be caregivers,
- and those who will need caregivers.

# Mahalo for Your Work as a Caregiver

## Who are Caregivers?

- One who helps another person in need. A person in need might be an ill spouse or partner, a child with a disability, an aging friend, a neighbor, or a relative.
- Can be family or Paid/unpaid Caregiver
- Varied professions and fields of study provide caregiving

# Varied “carers” are found among those with careers in Aging



- Social Work
- Public Health
- Nursing
- MD/Geriatrics
- Physical Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Recreational Therapy
- Psychology
- Speech Therapy
- Group and Care Home Operators

# Different skill sets but in general:



- Knowledge on the aging process and common aging-related
- Knowledge on service options from the well to the frail aged
- Effective communication, assessment, and advocacy skills
- Respect for and knowledge of diverse aging populations

# Where is Care Provided?



In varied settings:

- adult day care
- adult protective services
- assisted living
- nursing homes
- foster care homes
- small or group care homes
- health care settings
- private homes.



# Why focus on Caregivers?

- Growing aging population globally and Hawai'i
- Increased AGE of older adults
- Need to provide care for the frail/vulnerable
- Increasing needs for paid and unpaid caregivers
- Increasing demands on caregivers



# Today's Learning Objectives:

1. Understand the importance of wellness for both caregiver and care recipient
2. Describe five common challenges faced by caregivers
3. Provide tips and tools to address challenges and journey toward caregiver wellness
- 4.





# As a caregiver for older adults, you:

- Assist older people maintain or improve quality of life
- Provide a multidimensional understanding of aging and human behavior
- Emphasize the social context in which health and LTSS care is provided



# The joys and challenges of CG

- 1 in 3 adults in US is an informal or family caregiver.
- 4.6 million paid caregivers (cg); e.g., —personal care & support workers, home health, nsg. assistants.
- Caregivers: joys & challenges, cgs higher levels of stress than non cgs
- Caregiver need help and support.



# 5 Common CG Challenges

1. Complexities of CG and knowledge needs
2. Stress of Caregiving
3. Impact on health and well-being
4. Impact on emotional well-being
5. Impact career, work and finances

# 1. Complexities of CG

The need for knowledge is great. Consider:

- Common health and other changes and developments. And yet:
  - Individuality of the aging process
  - Diversity of older adults
  - Cohort (generational) changes



# The case of Mrs. E.



- 57 year-old small care home operator for 12 years
- Lives with husband, 4 children. Has diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol



- Mrs. E

- “It’s a 24/7 job. Even when others help, I worry. It’s sad. Dementia, Parkinson’s disease, stroke. I see it all. And the work is hard.



# For all caregivers—so much to know!

- **Knowledge needed:** Chronic health issues, Alzheimer's Disease, service options, family issues, health payment options, legal caveats and options
- **Skills needed:** Behavioral needs and problems, geriatric assessment, communication skills, case management, interventions for family, long-term care and end-of-life planning.
- **Financial:** Running a business



# Caregiving is a Rewarding Career but.....

- Ask for help!
- A geriatrician, a gerontological social worker, geriatric nurse, and other trained professionals can help to provide support and services to older adults and their families
- Centers and Associations
- Online resources



# 2. Stress and Caregiving

- Rewards (yes) but also demands and stress due to:
  - 24/7 nature of care
  - Increasing needs of elder
  - Feeling alone and/or isolated.
  - Too little guidance from health care professionals
  - Having no choice being a caregiver
  - Needing help to cope and solve caregiving problems



# Common Feelings: Stress and CG

- I am burned out
- I am feeling spiritually, distressed
- I am socially isolated,
- I need to improve my physical health.
- I am looking for strategies to balance, work and family.





# What can stress look like?

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Anger
- Fatigue
- Irritable
- Crying
- Losing temper
- Other?



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# To help manage stress

1

**Ask for and accept help.**

2

**Focus on what you can do.** At times, you might feel like you're not doing enough.. Believe that you're doing the best you can.

3

**Set goals you can reach.** Break large tasks into smaller steps that you can do one at a time. Make lists of what's most important. Follow a daily routine. Say no to requests that are draining

4

**Get connected.** Learn about caregiving resources here in Hawai`i or online. There might be classes you can take.

# Stop and Smell the Flowers!



# Relaxation Techniques

- Relax with mindfulness (focus on awareness on present moment without judgment) and relaxation techniques (yoga, tai chi, meditation) or breathing exercises to help your body relax.
- Can help lower blood pressure, lessen muscle tension, & reduce stress.
- Download a smartphone app with guided meditations or relaxing music. Many apps are free.



# Let's try a relaxation technique

1. Choose a comfortable seated position.
2. Breathe in and out through your nose.
3. Count during each inhale and exhale to make sure they are even in duration. You can add a slight pause for breath retention after each inhale and exhale if you feel comfortable. (Normal breathing involves a natural pause.)
4. Continue practicing this breath for at least 5 minutes.

# 3. CG and Impact on health

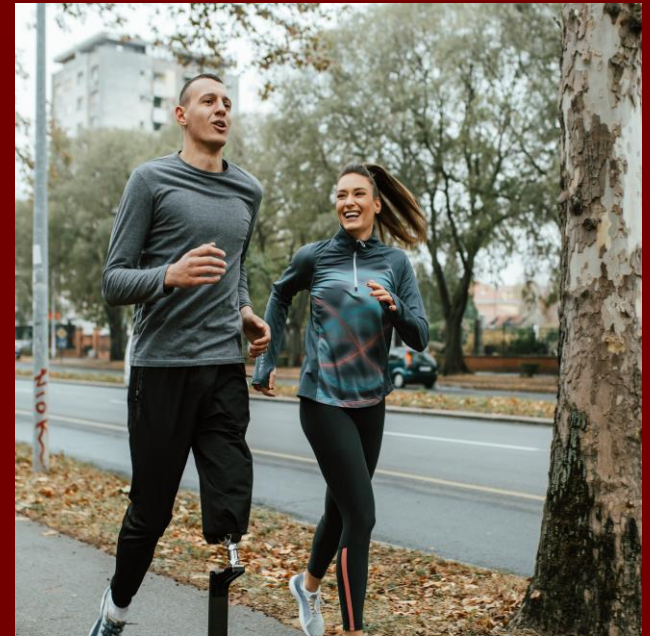
- Quality of life
- Sleep difficulty
- Self reported exhaustion
- Caregiving-related injuries
- Pain





# Physical Health

- 1. Get regular physical activity.** Exercise, — even in small amounts, — can boost energy levels. Exercise reduces stress, helps you maintain a healthy weight, and can help maintain blood pressure and cholesterol at healthy levels.
- 2. Maintain a heart-healthy diet.** Eating well can help prevent other health problems, too.



# Reminders!

- **Keep medical and dental appointments.** Do all you can to maintain your health. Ask for help when you need it so you can get away for your own medical appointments and take care of your health and well-being.
- Talk to a physical therapist— ways to help a frail elder without hurting yourself



# What Else?



- Trouble sleeping? Good sleep is important for health. Talk to your health care professional.
- Get the vaccines you need and regular health screenings. Share your work stresses, worries or symptoms you have

# 4. Caregivers and Emotional Well-Being

- Healthy
- Happy with their Lives
- Some financial security
- Have close relationships with family and friends





# Achieving/Maintaining Emotional Well-Being

- **Get social support.** A support group in help in person or online
- **Stay balanced.** See friends, and/or carve out “alone” time
- **Keep humor in your life.** Watch a funny TV program or movie. Find things to laugh about with the one you care for — that person needs joy, too





# At least once a week:



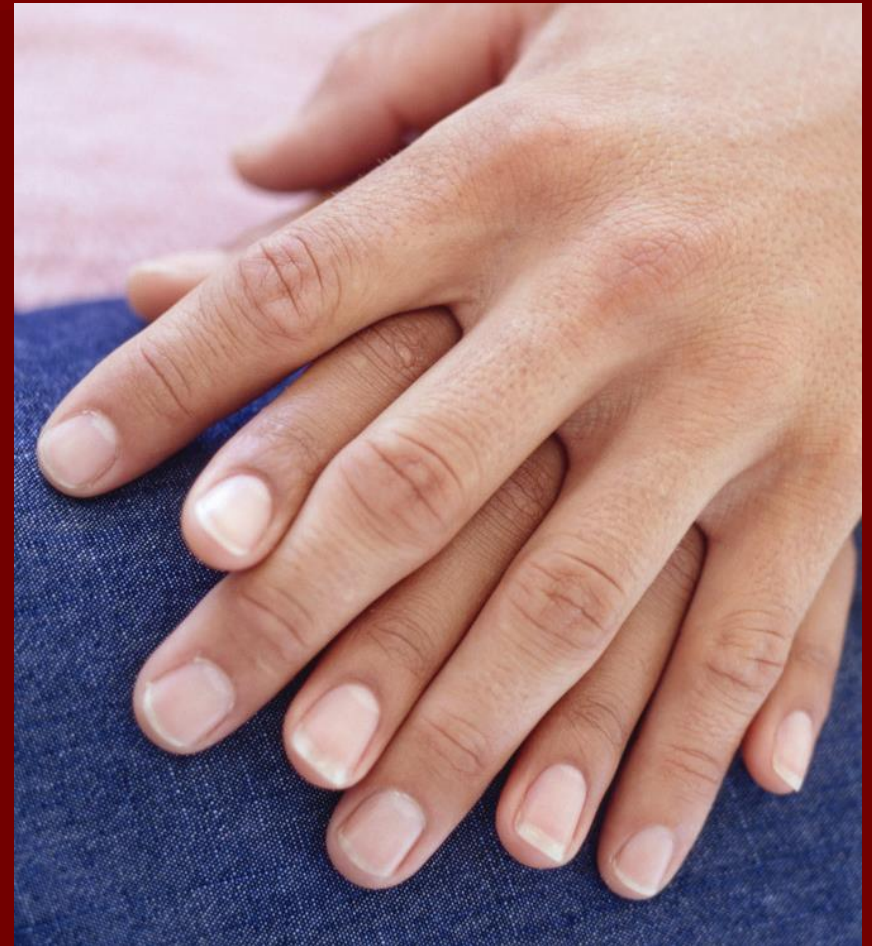
- Visit a local coffee shop
- Attend religious events
- Take a class
- Visit a friend.
- Ask for help.

# Pay attention to Depression

The demands on you as a caregiver can be difficult and stressful.

If you are experiencing signs of signs of depression, talk to your health care professional.

Often, depression can be managed with talk therapy or medication.



# 5. CG, Career, Work, & Finances

- 1. Take care of business.** Financial stress is real. Keep your finances in check, work and home balance, don't stop planning for the future.
- 2. Stay connected with other professionals. Seek advice, continue learning. But also stay connected with family and friends, in person, phone or online.**





# Conclusions: Caring for Caregivers

- A growing aging population in Hawai'i and around the world
- Need to promote healthy aging and care for those who can't care for themselves
- Increasing need for and respect for paid/unpaid caregivers



# Research based practice? What about Practice Based Research?

- Your knowledge can inform policy making at the state and national levels (e.g., long term care, Medicaid reimbursements, social security)
- Administration and program development (i.e., program design and housing)
- Advocacy—doing the “right’ thing
- Building a new knowledge base in research



# Above All: Compassion



- Be kind to the young, the sick, and the aged.
  - At different times in your life, you will be all three of these!

# Finally: Be Kind to Yourself



- You have a difficult job
- You are compassionate
- You are not alone
- There is help—remember to ask for it!
- <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/caregiving/taking-care-yourself-tips-caregivers>

Kamsahamida, arigato, xie xie, spasibo,  
mahalo, maraming salamat po, merci,  
thank you for all you do

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