

Exercising when you're looking after someone else

By Ross Goo

Of all the things you might like or want to do in your “spare time,” exercise might be the last activity on your list. Yet out of all the activities you could do, exercise may be the most rewarding and beneficial. Exercise may help prevent you from getting sick, can help you sleep better, and is almost sure to help you feel more energized. Three things a caregiver might find very useful indeed!

Exercise gives you that much-needed break from your caregiving duties, helps you stay in good shape so you can perform at your best, and helps you avoid costly downtime by giving your body a better chance to fight off illness. Wendy Lustbader, a national lecturer and the co-author of *Taking Care of Aging Family Members: A Practical Guide*, says “There is some interesting research indicating caregivers are more vulnerable to illness and can get sicker if they don’t take care of themselves.”

Going to the health club at your office or a nearby gym might help you feel more independent in your life and give you a sense of freedom. However, not always realistic, so if you are not able to fit the gym into your schedule, you can keep exercise as simple as a brisk walk around the block.

Another option is to use exercise videos at home. You can always stop or pause a video at any time if the person you care for needs your immediate attention.

Your goal is 30 to 40 minutes of moderately intense exercise three or more times a week. Ideally, you’ll want to exercise continuously for 30 minutes or more (some research says this gives you the maximum benefits). However, as you well know, taking that much time off may be challenging unless you have help.

Research shows that even little bursts of exercise are beneficial. Park the car further away from the shops, or take the stairs instead of the lift.

Your exercise goals may include losing weight or toning your body parts. Your goals as a carer may be to release stress and regain energy, stamina and strength. When you take a walk you should walk briskly to get your heart rate elevated. You should feel that you exerted yourself a bit. Try to work up a sweat, as that is one way to tell that you are getting a good workout.

Tips

Change your destination and path frequently to prevent boredom. Wear loose, breathable clothing and supportive shoes. Write down your goals and stick to them.

Ultimately, the returns for the time spent on exercise breaks are sure to be rewarding and will help ensure that you are able to meet the hurdles of a long day.

Be sure to check with a health professional before beginning any exercise program.

Published in Carers News Aug-Sep 2008

(Reproduced with kind permission of Ross Goo and the Strength for Caring website
<http://www.strengthforcaring.com>)