

Caregiving Corner

Resources & Solutions for Caregivers

New Year's Resolutions for Caregivers

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Some often compare fall and winter to a natural season of loss, death, and mourning. It is interesting that our cyclical seasons coincide with the calendar year. January represents a new year – fresh starts, a new beginning – so many people take this time to plan changes, make new pledges, and adjust attitudes and behaviors. This article could be about the holidays or any number of topics that speak to the cyclical nature of our lives that go along with the seasons, but it seems appropriate that this opportunity should be taken to plan for the New Year and challenge caregivers to make resolutions for 2006.

Caregiving is one of those life experiences, like parenting or learning, that can sometimes extend beyond the point at which you thought it would end. So, though it may not seem that a new year is actually any milestone for a caregiver, it could represent a fresh outlook. The following list is my suggested list of New Year's Resolutions for caregivers for 2006 – use all of it, some of it, or none of it, but at least challenge yourself to develop your own resolutions.

1. **Write down a list of your needs.** Post them on the fridge so that they are always visible – use the list to remind you how to focus on what you need to give to yourself throughout the year.
2. **Pick a stress management system that works for you.** Whether you purchase aromatherapy, enroll in a

yoga class, or take a daily walk, find an activity that helps you breathe better and clear your mind. Deep breathing exercises don't require much time and they enable round-the-clock caregivers to utilize a stress management technique right in your home.

3. **Find a caregiving buddy.** Join a support group or find someone at church or in your neighborhood who is also going through caregiving. Just as school moms find solace in relating to other parents of school-aged children, caregivers find comfort in sharing their stories with other caregivers who truly understand what they are going through.
4. **Find encouragement.** A panel member recently said that caregivers need encouragement above all else. Even if you buy a page-a-day calendar or read a religious passage, find a way to be inspired on a daily basis.
5. **Learn to ask for help.** Many caregivers with siblings and other family members still experience a huge burden because they fail to use those people around them for assistance. If a sibling visits and offers to take over caregiving for the day, or simply to run errands to take something off your plate, take them up

on their offer. Every little bit that someone helps you is less you have to worry about in the long run!

6. **Take time for yourself.** Plan a vacation, buy tickets to a show, or enjoy a great meal at your favorite restaurant. Make sure that, despite caregiving, you have time set aside for you to find pleasure in your own life. While caregiving can be satisfying and rewarding, it doesn't negate the fact that you need to spend time with someone other than the person you are caring for doing something that appeals to you.
7. **Educate yourself.** There are so many resources available to caregivers – many report that they are not able to easily locate the information they need. Buy books, use the internet, talk to friends, co-workers, and others – expand your base of knowledge about caregiving and the services that exist to make your job easier!
8. **Be an advocate.** When caregiving, remember that you will sometimes act as the voice for that person. Know about patient's rights if your loved one is in a long-term care facility and understand your legal rights and responsibilities if you are that person's power of attorney.
9. **Learn to say 'no'.** So many caregivers will make the comment that they have too much going on, and yet, people continue to ask things of them. Unless you have made a career out of caregiving *and* being a professional volunteer, be familiar with your limitations and be okay with saying 'no' when some people need something from you.

10. **Laugh often.** We don't need any research or study to tell us how important laughing is – if you don't already know that, you probably don't do it enough! Laughter isn't just about jokes, it is about keeping an open mind and a fresh perspective on a difficult situation.

So, use these resolutions, or make up your own – just plan to have a great New Year!