

15 Healthy Habits to Adopt

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The turning of a new year is a great time to reaffirm your commitment to your own health and well-being, especially if you have an aging loved one relying on you for care. Even if you're not one for making grand resolutions, try to adopt a few of these simple daily health habits:

- **Make yourself a priority:** Possibly the hardest directive for family caregivers; yet one of the most important. One longtime caregiver puts it this way: "What you can do as a caregiver can make a huge difference in their quality of life, but you can't change the course of their disease. So I think most of your efforts deserve to be on your own behalf. As the airlines say, put your own air mask on first. This isn't selfish. It is necessary."
- **Get organized:** Clear the clutter from your life with these [Strategies for Getting \(and Staying\) Organized While Caregiving](#) .
- **Make more meals Mediterranean:** Following a Mediterranean-style diet—full of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and healthy fats from olive oil and fish—has long been upheld as a paragon example of healthy eating. Mediterranean meals also offer distinct benefits to aging adults, as you can read about in [Top 3 Benefits of Mediterranean Diet Foods](#) . If testimony from diet experts doesn't persuade you of the benefits of going Mediterranean, perhaps the experiences of AgingCare.com blogger, Parkinson's patient and cancer survivor, John Schappi, can help: [The Mediterranean Diet: A Big Reason Why I Feel As Good As I Do](#) . Just be sure to stay away from too much baklava!
- **Stay social:** Experts have also found that isolation—both self-imposed and unavoidable—can significantly degrade a person's quality of life, which is why it's vital to stay connected to friends and family, even in the midst of a caregiving crisis. Maintaining strong social connections is essential for warding off depression and other chronic diseases. Learn how to avoid the [Deadly Consequences of Loneliness](#) .
- **Be diligent about brushing:** Take a few extra minutes each day to attend to your chompers. Poor oral health has been linked to a variety of ailments, from dementia to heart disease. Discover the [5 Things Your Teeth Say About Your Health](#) .
- **Get active:** Absence of physical activity is one of the top [10 Things That Age You](#) . Indeed, sedentary behavior can contribute to the development of not only physical but mental decline as well—especially as you age. But staying active doesn't mean you have to carve time out of your hectic schedule to visit the gym every day. There are many [at-home exercises](#) that can help you and your loved one maintain optimal physical and mental functioning.
- **Seek a serene mindset:** Anxiety and fear, two common emotional states experienced by caregivers, can really do a number on your overall well-being by kicking your stress response into overdrive and causing widespread inflammation in your body. Additionally, the [dementia-depression link](#) has undergone rigorous investigation by scientists, who've found that men and women who are clinically depressed have a heightened risk for developing dementia. While you may not be able to completely escape feelings of angst while looking after a loved one, [practicing mindfulness and meditation](#) may help you achieve a more mellow state of mind.

- **Safeguard sleep:** From memory to metabolism to mood management, getting enough sleep is the key component of a health body and mind. Check out these [11 Tips to Get Better Sleep](#) .
- **Celebrate the simple things:** Becoming a caregiver can help put things in perspective. Here's an example of one woman whose caregiving duties for her husband taught her to place more value on life's simple experiences: [The Simple Things in Life with Alzheimer's](#) .
- **Get a brown bag checkup:** So-called "brown bag checkups" are a great way to ensure the safety and efficacy of the medications you and your loved one are taking. During a brown bag checkup, you bring all of the medications you're taking—both prescription and over-the-counter—to your pharmacist, who will then make sure that none of the drugs could be negatively interacting with one another.
- **Search for support:** Support groups, both online and in-person, are essential resources for family caregivers. AgingCare.com has a virtual [support group](#) that contains thousands of real-time conversations between caregivers on everything from dealing with guilt and burnout, to [how to get paid for being a caregiver](#) .
- **Be more open-minded:** A recent research investigation of aging Finns discovered that older adults who adopted a more cynical worldview had a much higher dementia risk than those who were more trusting of other people. These findings held true, even for people who were not clinically depressed, or economically or educationally disadvantaged. Aside from the detrimental health effects of cynicism, consider how much better off the human race would be if there were a little less judgment in the world and a little more compassion and forgiveness.
- **Keep working:** Continuing to contribute to the workforce offers a variety of benefits beyond just the financial. Participating in an occupation that engages your brain is a great way to keep your mind sharp and boost your self-esteem. Depending on the demands of your caregiving duties, it may be impossible for you to hold down a full-time job, but there are many part-time and remote employment options you can pursue, like these [5 Work-from-Home Opportunities for Caregivers](#) .
- **Ask for help:** For many caregivers, relying on other people for help is somewhat of a foreign concept. Caregivers are used to taking care others, not having people provide assistance for them. Yet, a few extra hands to lighten the load may be just what you need. Try to get beyond the belief that you need to do everything for your loved one by yourself, and find a few family members, friends or neighbors who are willing to assist. Just remember this [one rule when asking for help](#) .
- **Learn something new every day:** Never stop learning; a mandate that may seem unimportant if you've been out of the classroom for a while. But there's always some new nugget of information that can help you look after your loved one more effectively. AgingCare.com has a library of free, downloadable guides for family caregivers looking to increase their knowledge about [Alzheimer's Care](#) , [Home Care](#) and [General Caregiving](#) .

From Del: These are very important, and although I haven't come close to mastering all of these, the ones I'm using are making a difference. Sometimes guilty stops me, until I realize that I have nothing to feel guilty for. I need to care for me. I know what happens when I don't!

What healthy habits will you adopt this year?

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