

## Protecting Caregiver Health in 2021

Numerous studies continue to demonstrate that caregiving can be bad for one's health. When caring for a person living with dementia, we know that caregivers experience prolonged levels of stress and many can experience depression that usually goes untreated. Unfortunately, as most of the attention is directed to the person living with dementia, the caregiver's health and well-being goes unchecked. Appointments for caregiver health often go unscheduled, rescheduled or missed. Added with other health habits that are hard to achieve, no wonder caregiver health can suffer.

Caregiver health is becoming a public health concern noting that proactive help and assistance is needed as a national priority. But on a more practical level, here are steps you can take as a caregiver to protect your health in the coming year:

- **Recognize that you can't do this job alone.** Create a team that can support you. This can include family members, friends, neighbors, support group members, etc. Let people know what you need – be specific. Needing help doesn't make you weak – it makes you human!
- **Don't ignore your own health needs.** Get an annual health check up and let your healthcare provider know that you are a caregiver! When you are being asked about physical concerns, remember to let your healthcare provider know about any mental health concerns you have as well. You are not crazy, lazy or inadequate – your life has been turned upside down.
- **Don't put off using respite care.** You need a break from the 24/7 responsibilities. Call the [Alzheimer's Association](#) or the [Area Agency on Aging](#) to learn about options from in home care to adult day health care.
- **Take inventory of your legal and financial needs.** Caring for a person living with dementia is expensive. You don't need to go broke doing so – find an [elder law attorney](#) or attend a class on what you need to know to address these concerns.
- **Proactively address safety concerns.** Falls are a major concern with aging. Ask your healthcare provider for a home health referral for home safety evaluation. A registered nurse or physical therapist can assess for dangers in the home to keep you and your loved one safe. Think about other safety concerns for your loved one that include driving, wandering, self-administering medications.
- **Keep learning and growing.** We hope you will join in our bi-monthly caregiver support group and monthly DFT Presents lecture series. The more you learn, the better equipped you will be in one of the most important jobs you've ever had.