

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF: 10 TIPS FOR SURVIVORS AND FAMILY MEMBERS

After brain injury, survivors and family members often describe having trouble adjusting to life changes and losses. Survivors are oftentimes faced with post-injury challenges that make recovery difficult. They may have trouble paying attention, communicating, or maintaining their balance. Going to doctors' appointments, dealing with financial issues and insurance problems, and coping with family conflict can seem to take up the majority of a survivor's time. To make matters worse, difficulties handling stress are quite common and survivors may feel easily overwhelmed.

It is not uncommon for family members to describe giving the majority of their energy to the survivor and others. Family members often find that they don't have enough time or energy to take care of themselves. Others feel guilty if they take time away from being a caregiver to do something fun. Many people put others' needs way ahead of their own. They neglect their own needs and don't nurture themselves. Striking a balance between what you need for yourself and what others may need is very important for family caregivers. Realize that you need to be at your 100% best to deal with the many injury-related challenges.

Why is taking care of yourself so very important?

- ◆ You'll be able to take better care of others.
- ◆ You'll be able to manage daily responsibilities more effectively and efficiently.
- ◆ You'll be happier and healthier – and the rest of your family will be too.
- ◆ Your stamina, insight, and thinking abilities will be better.

- ◆ You'll get along with others more effectively.
- ◆ You'll be better able to think up solutions to your problems.

How well are you doing at taking care of yourself? To find out, answer the True False questions below. Circle **T** for True and **F** for False next to each sentence.

- T F I try to get enough sleep at night.
- T F I have a fitness or exercise program.
- T F I take time out to rest and relax.
- T F I eat things that are good for me.
- T F I ask others for help when I need it.
- T F I avoid alcohol and drugs.
- T F I have hobbies or other activities that I enjoy on a regular basis.
- T F I talk to people I trust about my worries and concerns.
- T F I get together with friends/family regularly.
- T F I set small goals for myself that are meaningful.
- T F I monitor my stress level and emotions and seek support when I need it.
- T F I monitor my health and seek medical care when needed.
- T F I ask others to take on responsibilities when I am not able to handle them.
- T F I give myself credit for reaching my goals and taking small steps forward.
- T F I avoid taking on new responsibilities when I feel overwhelmed or stressed.
- T F I recognize my limits and adjust my activities accordingly.
- T F I let others help me.

Look over your answers, count up the number of *Trues* and the number of *Falses*. The more *Trues* you have circled, the better you are doing at taking care of yourself. If you have marked many items false, you may need to take better care of yourself.

What can you do to take better care of yourself? We've talked to many successful survivors and families to find out ways they take care of themselves. Here are a few strategies that have worked for other people. Look over this list and pick out which ones you think will work for you:

Set aside alone time. We all need time alone to re-charge our batteries. Take a little time out each day to do something alone – take a bath, go for a walk, write in a journal, meditate.

Take time out to do things you enjoy. Read a book, go dancing, watch a movie, etc. You'll be happier and better able to cope with life's stresses if you take time to do things you enjoy!

Keep track of your stress level and emotions. Monitor them regularly, so you can get help and support as needed.

Protect your health. Eat a balanced diet. Get enough sleep. Exercise regularly. Avoid alcohol and drugs. Follow up with your doctors regularly and take medications as prescribed.

Give yourself credit for things you accomplish. Everyone likes to be recognized for their successes. Don't wait for others to praise you. Reward yourself when you take positive steps or reach a goal.

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Remember no man is an island. Ask for help when you need it.

Everyone needs help at times in their lives, especially when facing new challenges. Let trusted family and friends help carry the load.

Don't overload yourself. When you take on new responsibilities, drop some of your old ones. Ask others to step up to the plate and help.

Remember that no one can do everything. Recognize your limitations. Try to take on activities that make the most of your strengths. Ask for help with tasks that are difficult for you.

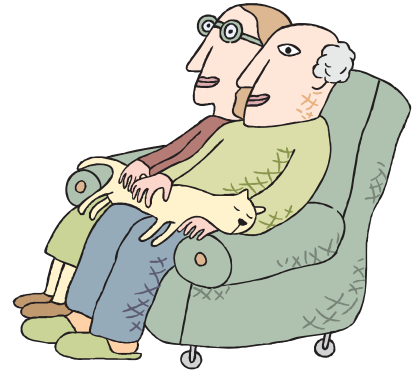
Ask others how they've coped with similar problems. You can learn a lot from people who have had similar experiences. Find out how others deal with problems. They may be able to save you time and pain.

Be kind to yourself. You have been through a number of very difficult situations. Give yourself credit for doing your best.

Remember, you must take care of yourself to help others who are important to you. Sometimes, it's hard to figure out where to start. If you aren't sure where to begin, consider talking with and getting ideas from someone you know and trust. They may be able to help you get headed in the right direction. Going to a support group is often helpful because you get the chance to hear from others who have been through similar experiences and learn about what worked for them.

Survivors and their family members may also be interested in a post-injury family support program at VCU Medical Center. The VCU TBI Model System Family Support Research Program was designed to address the needs of survivors, their family members, and other persons close to the survivor. Participants in the program learn about what to expect after brain injury and important skills for adjusting and extending the recovery

process. For more information about the program, please contact Jenny Marwitz by phone at 804-828-3704, toll free at 1-866-296-6904, or by email at jhmarwit@vcu.edu



JUST FOR FUN!

By Amy Riddick

CAN YOU SEE THE HIDDEN WORDS IN THIS WORD FIND?

T R U S T Q W E R T C Y
 U I O P B A S D F G O H
 J K F R I E N D L Z N X
 C V A B N M Q O W E C R
 C O M M U N I C A T E T
 Y U I I O P A T S D N F
 G H L J K L Z O X C T V
 B N Y M Q N U R T U R E
 W E R C T Y U I O P A A
 S D F H F G H J K L T L
 R E L A T I O N S H I P
 Z X C N V B N M Q W O E
 R T Y G U I O P A S N D
 F G R E S P E C T H J K
 L Z X S C V B N M Q W E

TRUST
 CONCENTRATION
 COMMUNICATE
 FRIEND
 FAMILY
 DOCTOR
 RELATIONSHIP
 TBI
 CHANGES
 RESPECT
 NURTURE