

PATHWAYS CENTER for GRIEF & LOSS

CARING FOR YOURSELF WHILE CARING FOR OTHERS DURING A PANDEMIC

Working in health care can be tiring, exhausting work. Being a caregiver during a global pandemic takes this exhaustion to a whole new level. You're shouldering the extra responsibility of being present for others in ways family cannot, given the restrictions. So much of your workday is different from before. And that's aside from all the changes happening to you personally on top of professionally. This situation is not a sprint, it's a marathon and chronic stress always impacts physical and mental wellbeing. So it is important to develop personal rituals and self-care mini-breaks throughout the work day. Take a moment for yourself throughout the course of each and every day.

- Rehydrate: Slowly drink an 8-16 ounce glass of water. Between sips, scan your body and notice areas of tension.
- Breathe: Sit up straight. Do slow, deep abdominal breathing for 6-10 breaths.
- Self-Massage: Gently massage your neck, shoulders, arms and hands to relieve tight muscles.
- Reflect: Take a moment to consider what you are grateful for. Identify something you did well so far today, perhaps a brief prayer if your faith is important to you.
- Acknowledge: If you are feeling sad, or frustrated, or depleted, acknowledge that. Give yourself permission to feel as you do and remind yourself you are doing the best you can. That's all anyone expects. Remember "this too shall pass."

Perhaps you intentionally set your own feelings and reactions aside during your shift. Remember you did just that – you set them aside. It is important to go back and revisit them later. When you do, mentally scan your body to determine where you are holding your stress. Be intentional about doing something you enjoy, and be 'in the moment' as you savor that enjoyment. Stress, especially chronic stress, can leave you feeling depleted and 'running on empty.' Just as you wouldn't dare drive your car further without refueling, you need to be sure to figure out what works to fill *you* back up again. Get enough sleep (at least 7 ½ hours), eat a healthy diet, and spend some time in nature. When taking a shower or bath, imagine the stress being washed away. Who are the people you can talk to by phone or video to recharge? Limit negative influences from both news and social media. If needed, contact a mental health professional or your EAP resources. You need to rejuvenate physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually, so consider all these spheres. There is a lot about this pandemic that is completely out of your control. What will be most helpful is to focus on what you *do* have influence and power over. Remember that there will always be stress in your life. It's how you handle stress that impacts your health.



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