

State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations



**Department of Human Services
Division of Elderly Affairs**

RHODE ISLAND SENIOR BEAT

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SIX EASY AT-HOME REMEDIES TO RELIEVE CAREGIVER STRESS

CRANSTON --- Since there are more than 150,000 Rhode Islanders age 65 and older, including more than 78,000 persons 75 and older, it's probably safe to say that you, or someone you know, is helping an older family member or friend stay in the community. Unpaid family caregivers are the foundation of a community-based support system that helps seniors live as independently and in the least restrictive environment as is possible.

As caregivers, they may provide meals, take the elder to the doctor's appointments, pick up their prescriptions, and check on them daily. The caregivers see themselves as just husbands, wives, sons, daughters, neighbors and friends who reach out to help someone. Sometimes the caregiver is supported by services such as Meals on Wheels, in-home care, respite care, or adult day services. Too often though, the family caregiver is the sole source of support for the senior.

The National Family Caregivers Association (NFCA) estimates that there are more than 65 million family caregivers nationwide, including more than 110,000 in Rhode Island, who assist seniors, adults with disabilities, and children with special health care needs.

Family caregiving does not come without an impact on the life of the caregiver. NFCA points out that the family caregiver devotes an average of 20 hours a week to their caregiving duties. Family caregiving can also take a toll on the health of the caregiver.

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According to the NFCA, nearly 72% of family caregivers report that they do not go to the doctor as often as they should and 55% report that they have skipped doctors' appointments for themselves. In addition, 63% say that they have poor eating habits and 58% indicate that caregiving has affected their efforts to exercise.

In addition to these effects, caregivers often cite stress as a major factor in their daily lives. It's a well-known fact that caregivers need to take care of themselves so that they can care for others. And since most caregivers don't have the time or the money to visit a spa twice a week, they need to develop easy, convenient, and effective ways to manage their stress. The web site at www.AgingCare.com has assembled a six-point stress management strategy using ordinary household items.

Hand Towels: Soak a hand towel in water and place it in the microwave for two minutes. Place the towel on the back of your neck and then over your face. This impromptu "steam treatment" will heat your skin and trigger an instinct to relax.

Water: Water can be a great noise muffler. But the sound and feel of water is also therapeutic. Take a 10-minute unhurried shower or steamy bath and feel the stress begin to go away. Focus on the bath or shower, not on any other issue, for that 10-minute stretch. Massage your head. Give yourself a 10-minute vacation. Chances are that you'll feel better and be able to handle whatever the rest of the day has in store for you.

Paper: It's not a good idea to keep all your anger, fear, or frustration bottled up inside you. Put pen to paper and write about your feelings. Studies show that writing about your challenges and feelings for just 10 minutes can help to lower your stress levels. Perhaps the experience of getting your fear and emotions out into the open helps to reduce the stress. Does anyone really know why this works? No matter. The studies seem to indicate that you end up with less stress and in a better mood.

Tea: Skip the coffee and drink tea instead. Research indicates that drinking tea daily can lower those stress hormones and aid relaxation. Chamomile, green and black teas seem to work best.

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CDs: Instead of grabbing the television remote, pop in a CD, or listen to your Ipod. Music been proven through the ages to have a calming effect and to reduce stress. (I didn't see any references to heavy metal music, but I assume that this would be the type of music to avoid if you're looking to turn down the "noise" in your life!).

Candles: The aroma of a candle burning is indeed therapeutic. Pick out a scent that you like and couple it with several minutes of slow, deep breathing. If you're not familiar with deep breathing exercises, ask your doctor or health care professional to connect you with someone who can teach you these techniques.

With a little practice and actually taking some time each day to take care of yourself, you can become a better caregiver.

Senior Journal: The Senior Journal cable access television series is produced by senior volunteers and adults with disabilities, and is sponsored by the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Division of Elderly Affairs (DEA), with the support of Rhode Island Public, Education, and Government Access Television. The Senior Journal is broadcast on Sundays at 5:00 p.m., Mondays at 7:00 p.m., and Tuesdays at 11:30 a.m. over statewide interconnect cable channel 13 and Verizon channel 32.

From April 21 through April 30, *Veterans Administration Center Extended Geriatric Care* will be aired. Paul Roberti of East Providence, program host and producer, interviews Kathy Langford, support coordinator, and Max Arias, social worker, for the Providence Veterans Administration Medical Center.

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The Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Division of Elderly Affairs (DEA) is responsible for the development and implementation of a comprehensive system of programs and services for Rhode Islanders ages 60 and older and for adults with disabilities. Questions or requests for additional information on the issues of growing older, or for issues concerning adults with disabilities in Rhode Island should be directed to: Larry Grimaldi, Rhode Island Senior Beat, Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Division of Elderly Affairs, 74 West Road, Cranston, RI 02920 or faxed to 462-0545. The e-mail address is lgrimaldi@dea.ri.gov.