

# Providing Holistic Care

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Caregiving is one of life's most rewarding challenges. It is a commitment to provide quality of care to your loved one through his/her life journey. However, through that journey it is easy to lose sight of our loved one's overall quality of life. What often times happens is that the focus of care is placed only on the physical well-being of our loved one rather than addressing the physical, psychological, and spiritual needs as one. Our body, mind, and spirit are connected and interrelated. Therefore, when our loved one is suffering physically he/she is also most likely suffering emotionally and spiritually. High quality care should always focus on holistic caregiving, incorporating care that addresses our loved one's body, mind and spirit. Here are 10 ways you can improve the quality of life of your loved one through holistic caregiving:

1. Listen. Listening means more than just hearing what our loved one says. Listening requires you to be focused, alert and attentive to everything that is going on. When listening becomes focused on the verbal and non-verbal expressions, you will start to hear a bigger story than what is on the surface. With this story you will better understand the overall needs of your loved one.
2. Be Empathic. Empathy requires that caregivers see and experience the world from their loved one's perspective while also maintaining an outside perspective. It's also important not to confuse empathy with sympathy, which is a feeling towards someone rather than as someone. The last thing your loved one wants is for you to feel sorry for them. They just want to be understood.
3. Focus on Personal Strengths. Through the aging process individuals often times focus on their body's physical disabilities, and develop a mind-set that dwells on things they can no longer do. To help combat this negative thinking, try to encourage your loved one to complete tasks that they can accomplish (e.g., dusting vs. sweeping). This type of intervention will likely improve their self-worth.
4. Counseling. Sadness and grief are common reactions that many people face through their journey of life as they face their chronic conditions. Often times that sadness and grief becomes more intense and interferes with daily functioning. Your loved one may feel helpless, worthless, and feel that their situation is hopeless. It's important not to ignore these feelings as a normal part of aging. It may be necessary to seek additional help through a professional counselor or clergy.
5. Encourage Relaxation. Many individuals dealing with a chronic illness usually have some degree of anxiety and restless that typically manifests from worry, tension, and nervousness. Therefore, it's important to encourage your loved one to partake in relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, stretching, listening to

soft calming music, aroma therapy, or meditating. These activities have been known to significantly reduce stress, improve health, and quality of life.

6. Promote Physical Wellness. Physical wellness is recognized by overall fitness and health. It is known that regular physical activity and a healthy diet helps to control or to reduce the risk for several chronic diseases. As a caregiver, you can encourage that your loved one have a balanced wellness program by ensuring that they are exercising daily within their physical capabilities, stretching, eating healthy foods, and getting adequate rest.
7. Pain Management. One of the most common symptoms of physical suffering is pain. It's important that pain be addressed immediately as it affects overall functioning. However, because of the misconceptions about pain it is not always treated appropriately. One common misconception is that because someone doesn't express pain means that they are not in pain. Therefore, it's important to ask your loved one about his/her level of pain and look for pain related behaviors of discomfort in their daily activities (i.e., grimacing, moaning, and crying).
8. Maintain Spirituality. By maintaining your loved one's spirituality you can bring about meaning, value, hope, and purpose to their inner life. Therefore, it is important to understand what their spirituality means to them. Their view on spirituality and life may come from a religious perspective, through being a part of nature, or something else. Once you understand what meaning it holds to him/her you can then help. Some of the things you might help with are reading scripture, listening to spiritual messages on tape, riding down a scenic road, and maybe it's just allowing him/her to express feelings.
9. Education. Educating yourself is essential if you wish to be an effective, holistic focused caregiver. Knowing as much information as you can about disease management and progression, available community services, caregiving techniques, etc. will allow you to have a greater understanding of your loved ones situation and also make educated decisions when providing holistic care. Therefore, seek out as many resources as possible that will expand your mind.
10. Take care of yourself. The key element to being an effective holistic caregiver is to always take care of you. You cannot provide quality, holistic centered care if you aren't assuring that your needs are being met. Take time for yourself and enjoy your life. There are many resources in the community that can provide you relief from the daily stressors of caregiving. Also, establish a support system between friends, family, church, and the community that you can utilize when you need a rock to lean on.

It's important to remember that the above are only a few essential things that can be done to assist yourself in providing care that is holistic and focuses on the body, mind, and spirit of your loved one. Let these suggestions be a stepping-stone to your pathway of

holistic caregiving. It will be important for you to research additional resources that will allow you to expand on these components of holistic caregiving.

Provided as a public service of the Caregiver Resource Network. The **Caregiver Resource Network** is a collaboration of Kent County organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at [www.CaregiverResource.net](http://www.CaregiverResource.net) or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.