

5 TIPS for caregivers

GETTING MORE EXERCISE

We all know that exercise is good for us – our heart, our weight, but did you know it’s good for your brain too? Scientists believe that exercise boosts the flow of blood to certain parts of the brain, which leads to the formation of new neurons in the hippocampus where learning and memory take place, and also repairs and strengthens the connections between brain cells. Exercise also dials down stress, reduces the risk of stroke, helps control blood sugar and reduces the chances of falling by improving balance and coordination. As a caregiver, you’re probably thinking, “how on earth do I have time to exercise too?” Here are five tips to help incorporate exercise into your day.

1 Do your chores.

The good news? You’re probably already getting some exercise without even trying. Household chores can be a great workout, especially vacuuming, gardening, or mowing the lawn. Even little chores like unloading the dishwasher can be turned into exercise by maintaining good posture as you’re bending and straightening and keeping your abs tight. Need to run some errands? Power walk while you shop at the grocery store. If you have a shorter list, consider nixing the shopping cart and carrying your items instead for a little strength training. Experts recommend 30 minutes of cardio a day, so even a quick shopping trip could turn into your daily workout.

2 Sneak it in!

Since no one wants to do chores all the time, think of ways to incorporate exercise into your fun activities too. When you’re out, take a further away parking spot to get in a little more walking. Or take the stairs instead of the elevator. You could even walk to a further away restroom to squeeze in more activity. Consider incorporating activity into your social gatherings as well. Meet a friend to take a walk instead of going to lunch. Or take a walk after lunch! Consider taking a dance class with your spouse, or just putting on a favorite song at home. There are lots of fun ways to be active that can make the idea of “exercising” less daunting.

3 Work your way up.

You may be thinking, that’s all well and good, but I haven’t exercised in years. Even with sneaking in some activity, how am I going to get in a half hour of cardio and 15 minutes of strength training 5 days a week? (Yes, that’s what’s recommended!) The answer? Rome wasn’t built in a day! You have to work your way up. If you don’t exercise at all, start by just walking for 5 to 10 minutes a few times a week. The next week make it 15 minutes. Or throw on your iPod and aim to walk for one additional song. You can gradually increase your activity when it feels comfortable for you. Not sure where to start? The CDC has a program called “Growing Stronger” that gives you specific exercises to try and takes you through how to gradually build your strength. Be sure to check with your doctor about the amount of activity that is good for you, and what goals you specifically should strive for.

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4 Do it for your brain.

Ok, so I can gradually increase my exercise. But will it really make a difference? Will it actually impact my health when I haven't really ever exercised? Actually, yes. A study at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign found that people aged 60-79 who completed a six-month program of brisk walking on a regular basis showed an increase in the size of the hippocampus – which usually shrinks by 0.5 percent each year. If nothing else, this study proved that exercise is absolutely good for your brain health, whether you've been a long time athlete or a professional couch potato.

5 Start now!

It's easy to say, "oh, I'll start that next week, or after this event, or after this trip." But start now! Even if it's just doing a lap around the neighborhood or a few push-ups before bed, do something! Lay out your work-out clothes in the evening, and try to do something first thing if you think you'll get busy or distracted during the day. Recruit a friend to exercise with to keep you motivated. Above all, find something that you enjoy. If you actually enjoy your exercise, you'll be more likely to stick with it. It's okay if going to the gym isn't for you. Take a 10 minute walk and work in the garden in the afternoon. Find a friend to play tennis with once a week. Just find something you enjoy and do it, because every little bit actually does help!



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