

# HEALTH MATTERS

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## Preventing Caregiver Burnout

**C**aring for a loved one is rewarding, but there's no doubt that it can be a challenging and demanding job, both physically and emotionally. Caregivers often work tirelessly to provide support to others, but may easily forego their own needs in the process. Caring for someone with memory loss can be especially difficult, as it requires significant time and energy to manage the individual's unique needs. Over time, these challenges can lead to burnout and exhaustion, which take a toll on the health and wellbeing of both the caregiver and their loved one.

We asked Peconic Landing's Director of Health Services, Jennifer Drofenik, for some tips to avoid caregiver burnout. Drofenik is a

Licensed Nursing Home Administrator and volunteers with the Alzheimer's Association in a number of capacities. She oversees Peconic Landing's memory support neighborhood Harbor South and has over 7 years of experience working with families and caregivers.

**1. Take care of your own health.** "Prioritizing self-care is the number one tool you have to prevent caregiver burnout," said Drofenik. Be sure to eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly, and get enough sleep. Engage in activities that bring you joy, such as hobbies or spending time with loved ones. "Don't give up the things that you love to do," she said. "And don't feel guilty about needing a break – you are no good as a caregiver if your own health is compromised."

**2. Educate yourself.** It's important to educate yourself and know as much as possible about what your loved one is experiencing. "Look for educational programs near you, and explore books or online resources so you can gain a better understanding of your loved one's diagnosis," said Drofenik. "Having more knowledge on the disease will help you to be realistic and plan for the future."

**3. Seek support from family and friends.** Caregiving can be a lonely job, and it is essential to have a support system. Reach out to family members and friends for help, or consider joining a caregiver support group to connect with others who are experiencing the same emotions and can relate to how you feel. "Caregivers often experience feelings of sadness, anxiety, anger, guilt, grief and frustration," said Drofenik. "Recognize that what you are feeling is completely normal, and remember that you are not alone." Call the Alzheimer's Association helpline at 1-800-272-3900 to speak with a social worker 24/7 or to join the local caregiver support group hosted at Peconic Landing.

**4. Get organized.** Caregiving can be overwhelming and stressful, but getting organized can help reduce stress and increase efficiency. "Routine can be very important, especially when caring for a loved one with dementia," said Drofenik. "Create a schedule for caregiving tasks, evaluate safety measures in your home, and be sure to have a

back-up care plan in case of emergencies," says Drofenik. "Most importantly, make sure to plan time for yourself."

**5. Explore care options near you.** Look for care centers that offer adult day programs or residential respite care, which is short-term or temporary care that provides a much-needed break from a caregiver's responsibilities. Respite care also offers opportunities for socialization and engagement. "Peconic Landing offers both respite care in the home through our Home Care services, and residential respite care for stays longer than two weeks in our award-winning memory support neighborhood, Harbor South," shared Drofenik. Harbor South is the only memory support neighborhood in New York to be recognized as a Distinguished Provider by Dementia Care Specialists and the Crisis Prevention Institute. "An added benefit of residential respite care is that you can experience the quality of care and get comfortable with the idea of long-term care in the future," she added. "Remember that asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness."

**Learn more about Peconic Landing's residential Respite Care at Harbor South for Memory Support by visiting [www.peconiclanding.org/respite](http://www.peconiclanding.org/respite) or by calling (631) 593-8323.**

**Explore Peconic Landing Home Health Services at [www.peconiclanding.org/home-health-services/](http://www.peconiclanding.org/home-health-services/) or by calling (631) 477-2146.**