

## Caregiver Stress: 12 Tips for Adult Children of Aging Parents by award-winning author and stress relief expert Susie Mantell

**Even in the best of circumstances**, it's a delicate balance to organize a life in such a way as to sleep enough, work enough, connect with others, enjoy meaningful time alone —and still get to all the things we love or need to do.

Many men and women are finding themselves in "*The Sandwich Generation*," caring for aging parents while still parenting their own children. They may also have health issues of their own, or be exploring retirement plans. (*NOTE: If you've not in this particular age group, there are suggestions here for you too, and perhaps some you can share with others.*)

**Q: Dear Susie,** For three years I've visited my beloved father several times each week, as Alzheimer's slowly takes him away. My mom, wife, siblings and I are all exhausted and under tremendous stress. I'm torn between my heartfelt desire to meet *both* of my parents' needs, while being there for my wife and our children. How can I help my father to experience what peace and pleasure he can, be there for my family, do my job—yet also meet my own physical and emotional needs without feeling guilty?

**A: Dementia slowly steals our loved ones from us, one memory at a time.** Each response, or glimmer of recognition at once warms the heart, and breaks it. Yours is a sad and complicated situation that's affecting so many families today. It is a sacred trust to care for a parent in decline—a solemn, often unfamiliar responsibility. Priorities and needs shift, creating opportunities for us to be of service and support to them — as they were for us — as we accompany them along this leg of their journey.

The challenge is to do this in ways that

- ... meet their physical, emotional, spiritual and safety needs.
- ...demonstrate respect and compassion for their own frustration at this time in their lives.
- ...afford them as much independence as possible, in every way possible, for as long as possible.
- ...maintain our own balance, relationships, wellbeing, and as much normalcy as possible.

In unique and special ways these, too, are precious days with your parent.  
Live each one in ways that will allow you to respect yourself when you look back.  
You'll be so glad you did...

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## 12 Tips for Caregivers Providing Long-Term Care

by award-winning author and stress relief expert Susie Mantell

1. Let your friends know you need them. Often, friends would like to help, but may not know how. Call a friend *today*, and make a date to get together, or schedule a phone date to talk over your feelings.
2. Find a skilled and compassionate geriatric physician with whom to consult. Also seek out a psychotherapist with geriatric expertise with whom your mother might share her feelings, explore her own needs for assistance, and reassurance. There are also community resources, groups and books that may be helpful.
3. Invest a little time in yourself. Look around your home and choose a manageable home-improvement project you could accomplish in one day. New bed linens? Organize a closet? Start small.
4. Caregivers may not have known your loved one before these changes. Place photos of your parent in better times on his night-table, bureau, etc. I once saw a very aged woman sporting a "button" her kids made her with a photo of her laughing, wind-blown, on a ski trip. It told a wonderful story!
5. Put together an album of happy memories. Perhaps it will reconnect him/her to loved ones, and to remember fun times. Include pictures of you, your mom, siblings, and children at all ages. Include pets and vacations.
6. You have been, and will be, knocked off-center many times in this process. Find a skilled, compassionate counselor who can provide professional expertise, objectivity and support as you navigate this stage of life.
7. Pets can bring exquisite comfort. If your loved one cannot have a pet now, buy a small, ultra-soft, cuddly stuffed animal your parent can hold and stroke for comfort and companionship. Many living with dementia find holding a soft baby-doll or a stuffed animal deeply comforting.
8. Music can bring us back to a joyful time and place where we first heard or danced to a song. Fill your loved one's days with music from earlier years, and Broadway, movies, childhood. Curiously, even after losing the ability to speak, some people living with dementia can still *sing*—and enjoy listening.
9. Long-term illness can pull families together — or tear them apart. Spend time talking with, and listening to your family. Listen between the words. Reassure them that although you are sad, you're taking good care of yourself at the same time. Your powerful example may help *them* to cope throughout their own lifetimes.
10. Schedule at least one daily pleasure for yourself, without exception. See my list on the Tips page of [www.relaxintuit.com](http://www.relaxintuit.com) titled " 50 Ways to Feel Really Good— Fast!"

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