

## Care-giving with Balance

Loving yourself is enormously rewarding. It allows you to maintain a level of self respect that will fuel your ability to provide balanced care-giving throughout your lifetime. Care-giving without balance leads to a greater incidence of chronic disease and a higher death rate for the care-giver. Scientific studies have shown that people who routinely take care of themselves while they take care of others, live longer and have a greater sense of joy and fulfillment than those who don't.

How do you learn to love yourself? First, learn about yourself and your needs. Take some time in the early morning hours, or late at night before you fall asleep, to reflect on what makes you feel good. Caring for yourself means that your needs deserve the same respect as the needs of others. Does this make you feel a bit uncomfortable? For many of us, it does and we even feel a little guilty. Why? Because so many of life's daily rewards come from the applause we get when we help others. Who is giving you a standing ovation when you go for a walk or take a quiet break to regroup? The answer is you! You and only you will give you that pat on the back. You are your own knight in shining armor. Remember what it's like when you meet someone special? You will go out of your way to do anything for them and you want

to learn all you can about them. That's how you should treat yourself each and every day, with love and care.

Sounds simple, right? Not exactly and here is a good way to start. Take it a step at a time. On your daily list of things to do for your loved one, add something that is only for you. Start small, take a bubble bath, go for a walk and enjoy nature or make a phone call and laugh with a friend. Make it number one on your list and keep reading it throughout the day until you accomplish it. It takes time to create a new habit so be patient with yourself. Keep adding something to your daily list until it is as important to you as brushing your teeth. You will find that you are smiling more and your loved one will see and feel the difference too.