

Self-Care for the Caregiver

Learning to say "no" to extra demands on your time.



As a caregiver, you may find yourself overwhelmed with so many responsibilities that you neglect taking good care of yourself. Self-care is not selfish. In fact, taking care of you may be one of the best gifts you can give to the person you care for. Extra requests may be flattering, but may also equate to additional stress. We encourage caregivers to be honest with what you can and cannot do and feel empowered to say no. Permission granted.

When you don't say no, you may find yourself feeling rushed, tense, or irritable and the person living with dementia will likely mirror those feelings, resulting in unwanted behaviors. When you take care of you, the person with dementia will benefit by having you at your best. Saying no to a new commitment honors your existing obligations and prioritizes yourself.

When to say No

Weigh the yes-to-stress ratio:

- **Will it enhance your well-being?** Ask yourself if the new commitment helps you take care of your own physical, psychological, spiritual, or emotional well-being.
- **Is it a lengthy commitment?** Doing something one time is less consuming than a longer project. Going out for dinner with an old friend, for example, holds a different amount of weight than helping plan a class reunion.
- **Is it something you feel you should do?** Caregiving is filled with a range of emotions. Don't agree to do something out of guilt or obligation.
- **Will you be overcommitted?** Pause before you respond. Take a day to think about the request and how it will impact your caregiving situation. Look at your calendar and upcoming dates and appointments.

How to Say No

- **Use the word.** The word "no" has power. Of course, adding a "thank you" to it is polite. Avoid phrases, such as "Probably not" or "I don't think so." These can be interpreted to mean that you might agree with a little coaxing.
- **Be proud.** You have an extremely important role for your loved one. Use this as an opportunity to add to your circle of support. The person may benefit from and appreciate knowing why you are saying "No." Try instead, "No, thank you. My husband has Alzheimer's and needs my focus right now."
- **Extend grace.** It can be tough to turn down well-intended people. Complimenting them, while saying that you can't commit, shows that you respect what they're trying to accomplish. For example, if a friend from church asks you to help serve on a committee, you may say, "I'm grateful for the good work your committee does and appreciate that you thought of me. That's not something I am not able to do given my husband's health. Maybe you could stop over for a cup of coffee instead."

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