

## **CAREGIVER: TAKE CARE of YOURSELF**

According to the Family Caregiver Alliance, one out of 4 households is involved in providing care for a person over age 50. Shultz and Beach reported a study of spousal caregivers, age 66-96, which found that caregivers who experience mental or emotional strain have a 63% higher risk of dying than non-caregivers. You don't need a study to tell you how stressful the role of caregiver can be. In order to care for someone, you first must take care of yourself!

Caregivers report that they experience problems with sleep deprivation, poor eating habits, lack of exercise, postponement or failure to make and keep medical appointments. Any one of these would place the caregiver at greater risk for health problems. Family caregivers often take on the burden of caring for their loved one while ignoring their responsibilities to care for themselves. It is equally important to take of your physical and emotional needs. Here are some ways to help you while caring for someone:

- Identify sources of stress – recognize what you cannot change and try to accept it
- Use stress reducers such as exercise, socializing, meditation & relaxation
- Ask for help – even a brief break can relieve stress
- Take time off and don't feel guilty
- Utilize community and personal resources for respite care
- Make sure you keep your own medical appointments
- Keep a diary of your thoughts and feelings
- Get involved in a support group or seek professional support
- Get proper sleep and nutrition

If you would like to discuss your individual situation or learn of support groups in our community, call Kathy Laufer, LICSW at the Newton Senior Center, (617) 796-1660.