



Oxygen Mask Moments for Sustainable Self-Care

Because Caregiving Shouldn't Mean Losing Yourself in the Process

By: Dementia Coach Diane

A Personal Note to Caregivers

Hi friend,

If you're a caregiver, you already know that self-care doesn't exactly look like it used to.

Gone are the leisurely spa days and uninterrupted bubble baths. (Honestly, who has time for bubbles when the only thing you've managed to wash today is a sippy cup and maybe a single sock?)

But here's the truth: Self-care is more important than ever. Not just so you can take care of someone else—but so that you can experience more peace, resilience, and even joy in the middle of this wild and sacred journey.

Why Oxygen Mask Moments Matter

When your loved one is diagnosed with dementia—or any progressive illness—it isn't just sad. It's traumatic. Suddenly, your brain and body are on high alert:



You're grieving and caregiving at the same time.



You're trying to solve problems that change daily.



You might wake up to your spouse not recognizing you... or to your mom trying to care for a "baby" that doesn't exist.

These aren't just stressful situations. They're nervous system-altering events. And when they pile up, your body gets stuck in a state of hypervigilance.

You forget how to relax. You forget how to sleep. You might even forget how to breathe.

Oxygen Mask Moments are short, doable self-care practices that retrain your nervous system to feel calm and connected—even if chaos is still happening around you. These small acts, done consistently, give your body and mind the reset they so desperately need.

First, Let's Talk About the Mindset Shift

Before you can practice self-care, you have to believe you're allowed to.

Many caregivers don't take care of themselves because:

- They believe it's selfish
- They think no one else can care for their loved one as well as they can
- They want to "get all the work done first" — as if that time will ever come

But here's the truth: Self-care isn't selfish. It's sacred. Your well-being isn't a luxury. It's a lifeline.

Try asking yourself these 3 questions before jumping into action:



- 1.) Does it need to be done?
- 2.) Does it need to be done by me?
- 3.) Does it need to be done now?

Sometimes, the greatest act of love is knowing when to rest. Start by shifting your mind about self-care. Your body will follow.

Self-Care Starts With the Breath

When we're in a stress state (sympathetic activation), our breath gets short and shallow. We hold our breath like it's helping us check off boxes faster. (Spoiler: It's not.)

The quickest way to calm your nervous system is to breathe deeply and intentionally.

But not all deep breathing is created equal. Try these simple steps to access deep breathing using your diaphragm vs breathing shallowly from the upper part of your chest

- 1 — Sit or stand tall, and place one hand on your belly.
- 2 — Inhale slowly through your nose, feeling your belly rise (not your shoulders).
- 3 — Exhale gently through your mouth, feeling your belly fall.
- 4 — See if you can **extend** your exhale longer than your inhale.
- 5 — Do this 3–5 times. Slowly. Gently.

You're not just breathing.

You're reminding your body that it's safe.

Self-Care is Something to Enjoy...

Yes, even amidst grief and stress, self-care can feel good.

But it takes **intention**. It takes **practice**. And it takes **permission**.











That's why I want to share **these...**



Practical Principles for Sustainable Self- Care

- 1.) Stop While You Still Want More.** Don't wait until you're exhausted to stop. End your self-care practice while it still feels good — so you'll look forward to coming back. Inspiration creates momentum. Obligation creates resistance.
- 2.) Start Smaller Than You Think You Need To.** If five minutes feels too big, start with 30 seconds. Lower the bar until you can't fail. Success isn't starting big — it's starting at all.
- 3.) Don't Practice for Results. Practice for Relationship.** Self-care isn't about “fixing” yourself. It's about befriending yourself — again and again. It's not about achieving peace. It's about being with yourself in the process.
- 4.) Make the Micro Sacred.** A sip of water. A hand on your heart. A single deep breath. That's self-care too. It doesn't have to be long to be holy.
- 5.) When in Doubt, Stack It.** Pair your self-care practice with something you already do — brushing your teeth, waiting for coffee to brew, sitting at a red light. Tiny habits + existing routines = actual follow-through.
- 6.) Trade Judgment for Curiosity.** If a practice doesn't feel good, don't quit — get curious. What do I need right now? How can this be more enjoyable? Self-care isn't a test. It's an experiment.
- 7.) Let Your Practices Be Ugly, Messy, and Incomplete.** You don't have to journal beautifully. You don't need a silent room to meditate. You don't even need to finish your glass of water. Imperfect practice is still sacred practice.
- 8.) Let Inspiration Lead — Not “Shoulds.”** Don't do the practice you feel you *should* use. Do the one that *calls* to you. Maybe today is for tapping. Maybe it's for humming. Maybe it's for lying on the floor and sighing. The body knows what it needs. Follow the whisper, not the whip.
- 9.) Repeat the Ones That Work — And Release the Ones That Don't.** If a tool works for you, great. If it doesn't, that's not failure. That's information. You're not doing self-care wrong. You're learning your own rhythm.
- 10.) Rituals Over Routines.** Routines are tasks. Rituals are sacred. Try lighting a candle, saying a mantra, or whispering “I'm worth this” before you begin. The smallest shift in mindset can make a moment feel like a gift.

10 Oxygen Mask Practices to Try Today

-  1.) **Warm Water Reset** | Run warm water over your hands or splash it on your face. Add a drop of essential oil if you have it. Even one minute at the sink can calm your vagus nerve.
-  2.) **Barefoot on the Ground** | Stand in grass or on dirt for 60 seconds. Grounding (also called earthing) has been shown to reduce inflammation and anxiety.
-  3.) **Mirror Mantra** | Look in the mirror and say, “You’re doing a good job. This is hard, and you’re showing up.” Bonus points if you smile awkwardly at yourself afterward.
-  4.) **Notification Fast** | Turn your phone on silent or do-not-disturb for 15–30 minutes. The world won’t fall apart—but your nervous system will thank you.
-  5.) **Salt + Lemon Water** | A pinch of sea salt and a squeeze of lemon in water can support your adrenals and help regulate energy and mood.
-  6.) **Doodle Therapy** | Grab a pen and paper and just... doodle. Swirls, boxes, stick figures. Let your mind wander. You’re not making art; you’re making space.
-  7.) **Scent Anchor** | Keep a calming scent nearby (lavender oil, a favorite lotion, even Vicks VapoRub!). Smell is directly connected to your brain’s emotional center.
-  8.) **One Song Dance Party** | Put on a single uplifting song and move however your body wants. Shake it out, twirl, or gently sway. (No judgment zone.)
-  9.) **Tiny Light Inventory** | Write down three small “lights” from your day—things that went a bit better than expected. It helps rewire your brain to scan for goodness instead of danger.
-  10.) **Connection Check-In** | Send a quick text to a friend who gets it. “Thinking of you. You’re not alone.” You’ll likely get a reply you didn’t know you needed.

A Final Reminder

You are not selfish for needing a break. You're a soul carrying a heavy load. And self-care isn't a luxury—it's a lifeline. Let's take this journey together.

With love and a sigh of relief,

- Dementia Coach Diane

Together We're Stronger, Together We've Got This!

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