

A little rest goes a *Taking a break from care*

“I feel so guilty taking time for myself.” When I hear a caregiver say this statement, my instant reactions are dismay and concern. I know caring for someone can be about “36-hour” days, broken sleep, and stressful relationships. However, I also know that without a break, caregivers can end up feeling resentful, tired, burnt out, or ill.

In my eldercare practice, I recommend to families that they have paid respite of two to three weeks every three or four months. You may think, “that will never work in my situation.” I agree that not all families recognize how badly respite is needed. However, you can make short-term compromises that enable you to manage in the long term without the build-up of resentment, anger, and health problems.

At first, building respite into your life may seem time-consuming. However, respite is guaranteed to help you keep your loved one at home longer without compromising your own health and well-being. Fortunately, you can find respite in many ways. Following are 10 ways to help you take a much-needed break from care.



Ask for help.

Other people may have no idea of what is so difficult about looking after a loved one 24 hours a day. Allow others

to help you and your loved one. If you are a member of a church or religious organization, you might find much needed help within the congregation.

Share the care.

Do you have a friend who is also a caregiver? Could you bring your loved ones together at one home for a couple of hours so that one of you could have a break? If so, why not do this and then take turns? Even if both caregivers stay together for a coffee and a visit, you will feel more rested. Your loved one may also respond very positively to the outing.



Get fit.

Walking for 15 or 20 minutes once a day, staying fit to a DVD exercise program, or going to a swimming class with a friend will help you revitalize for the coming day.



Try a night away.

Many long-term-care centres (nursing homes) have respite spaces set aside for short-term stays. These spaces can be booked for a per diem cost. This is a great way to give yourself a night off and to introduce your loved one to staying in long-term care.

Get together with a friend.

Reach out to friends or family members who you feel understand your situation. Suggest going for a cup of coffee or tea. Try to make this get-together a regular event. Oftentimes, having something to look forward to will help you feel less stressed.

Photo: Auberge Du Lac
Taureau, Quebec.

long way

By Betty Macpherson-Veitch, BSW, RSW



Distract yourself.

Play with your pet. Or watch a funny movie or concert on TV. These days you can purchase inexpensive DVDs and videos showing old movies or TV shows. Or if you enjoy music, get out your old tapes, records and CDs. You may find that your loved one also enjoys the shows or music. *This is a great opportunity for you to sit back, relax, and forget about the grind of always giving.*

Join a support group.

Many hospitals, churches and community centres run local caregiver support groups. Organizations like Alzheimer Society Canada and Parkinson Society Canada also have support groups throughout the country. *Check in your local town or surf the Internet to locate groups in your area.*

Arrange for home-care help.

If your loved one qualifies for a home care program, ask whether or not a paid caregiver can be provided once or twice a week so you can get out of the house. This extra service may be available free or for a minimal charge, depending on your income. *If you can afford it, ask if you are able to hire the same caregiver for some additional time.*



Make time for yourself every day.

This time period may be no more than 15 minutes. It could be when your loved one is having a nap, or it could be when the home care worker comes to provide personal care. Either way, this is your time. Try to go out once a week. Book a massage or try a yoga class. *It'll be therapy for your mind and body.*



Look for adult day-support programs.

These programs are available for a minimal cost in most communities. Generally, you can access these programs from one to three days per week. In some areas, these programs are run during evenings and on weekends. *Check with your local government home care provider for information on programs near you.*



Photo: Auberge Du Lac Taureau, Quebec.

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Choosing the right rollator or walker

In this article, the second in my series on assistive devices, we'll look at rollators and walkers. The information that follows is meant to be an overview of these devices and their features; while it does not substitute for the recommendations of your therapist, it will help you make an informed decision.

By Linda Norton, BSc OT, OT Reg (Ont)

Both walkers and rollators offer you more assistance with your balance and support than would a cane or crutches. So what's the difference between a rollator and a walker? There are many subtle differences which we'll discuss below, but the main difference is that a rollator has a seat and four wheels, two of which swivel, while a walker has four legs. Also, a walker enables you to support more of your body weight through your arms.

Choosing the right walker or rollator

Choosing the right walker/rollator fit is the same as a cane. When you are standing erect, the walker/rollator grips should be the same height as where your wrist bends. This means that when your hands are on the grips, your elbows will be slightly bent. Note that a walker's four legs adjust independently; you'll want to make sure they are adjusted to the same height and that the walker is level when you are trying one for size.

It is important to check the walker's or rollator's weight capacity to ensure that the device can manage your weight. Most folding walkers have a weight capacity of 300 to 350 lbs.

On the other hand, rollator weight capacities vary from 250 to 350 lbs. Heavy duty walkers and rollators are available with weight capacities up to 500 lbs.

Many options and styles

As with other assistive devices, rollators and walkers come with many options and styles. Each style has features that may be useful depending on your needs.

Walkers: Walkers come in folding and non-folding models and are often used mostly indoors, for short distances, or to assist with therapy. If you are going to transport the walker from place to place or you use a wheelchair or scooter part of the time, you may want to consider a folding walker. A non-folding walker is more difficult to transport, particularly if you're trying to fit it in the trunk of a car.

Many walkers can be adapted with skies or wheels in the front to make moving the walker easier. Also available are forearm attachments that allow someone who cannot grip the walker to bear weight through their forearms. Other attachments may include a bag or a tray to allow you to carry items from place to place using the walker. Either of these can be a handy place to store a cordless phone, so that it comes with



Photo: Sunrise Medical

you rather than you having to rush to answer a call.

Auto-stop wheels may be available on some models. This type of wheel is free to move when your weight is off the walker yet “locks” when your weight is on the walker. This makes the walker easy to push but still stable when you put your weight on it for balance.

Rollators: Most rollators come with a braking system. Many have a “slow down”-style brake to improve rollator control over inclined surfaces. The same brakes also have a locked position, which offers additional safety when you’re reaching for your rollator or sitting on the seat.

Frame style is an important consideration. Rollators are available in a three-wheeled configuration, which may be most appropriate for indoor/flat surfaces, or a four-wheeled configuration. Most rollators fold front to back to allow them to be more easily transported. When rollators fold in this manner, baskets and other accessories may not need to be removed. Some rollators have been redesigned to fold more like a wheelchair, although the basket usually needs to be removed when folding the rollator. Rollators that fold this way will still stand when folded, and they may be partially folded for use through narrow doorways and hallways.

While you may not be sitting on the rollator for long periods, you should still determine whether or not the seat and backrest are comfortable. Seats vary in width and padding, and back rests/supports vary in rigidity, padding and height. If you choose a padded seat, consider a small tray to place on the seat when you are carrying drinks or other items on the seat.

One of the most popular rollator accessories is a basket. Basket styles and sizes vary with walker models. Consider what you would like to carry with you, if you need to access the basket while you are sitting or standing, and the ease with which it can be removed. Choosing a



Photo: Invacare Canada

basket with these things in mind will ensure it is useful.

Colour may also be an important consideration. As discussed in my previous article on canes, choosing a device that you like will improve your chances using it, maximizing your mobility and independence.

Regardless of whether you purchase a walker or rollator, make sure you are comfortable with its features. You should know how to adjust the height and fold the device. You should also know how to use the brakes, how to remove and replace the basket, and how to move the rollator over a small step. You also need to consider how best to use the device in your daily activities. For example, if you have a rollator, don’t just park it at the entrance to the kitchen and use the counters to navigate around the room. If possible, bring the rollator into the kitchen. You can sit on the seat at the counter to prepare your food or use the rollator’s seat to transport items around the kitchen.

Whether you choose a walker or a rollator, you’ll benefit from the increased mobility and independence that these helpful devices offer. If you’re interested in learning more about these devices, talk to your therapist or visit your local home health care store and speak with a staff member. Many walkers and rollators are available, and one will be right for you! ●

Editor’s note: In her next article on assistive devices, Linda will talk about manual wheelchairs.

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“Everywhere is within walking distance if you have the time!”

Anonymous

Walker safety tips



Photo: Sunrise Medical

- ✓ When sitting down on a chair or couch, back up to the chair, reach down and use the arms of the chair to sit. When standing up, use the arms of the chair to help you get up; do not pull on the walker or rollator as it may tip.
- ✓ When walking and turning, stay between the handles of the walker or rollator. Do not move to the side of the walker and hang on to only one side. A walker or rollator is more prone to tipping in this position.