FOR CAREGIVERS

Being a caregiver for someone with a chronic condition such as epilepsy can be all consuming. A caregiver may feel guilty taking time for themselves. However it’s vital for those who help others to focus on their own health and wellbeing. After all, if you aren’t healthy and emotionally well, you can’t help or take care of someone else. It’s time to make your own wellness a priority.

Some social workers say to caregivers that taking care of themselves is like using oxygen masks on an airplane. In the event of a sudden loss of cabin pressure, flight attendants instruct passengers to make sure that their masks are on securely before attempting to assist someone else. Trudi Frazel, a trainer, coach, and consultant for child protection social workers in California, has introduced a different metaphor (https://www.uuworld.org/articles/scuba-metaphor) that makes more sense. Frazel suggests that seeing to your needs as a caregiver is more like donning a scuba diver’s mask.

Rather than waiting for an emergency to put on their metaphorical oxygen mask, Frazel suggests that caregivers take care of themselves more like scuba divers. She says, “Scuba divers use oxygen tanks to help them survive in the
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Webinar: Ketogenic Diets: High Fat for Fewer Seizures

Wednesday, January 23, 2019, 8:00 to 9:00 p.m. ET

Moderated by Dr. Elaine Kiriakopoulos, director of health communications and engagement for the Epilepsy Foundation, the webinar features guest speakers from Johns Hopkins Hospital: Eric H. W. Kossoff, M.D., medical director of the Pediatric Ketogenic Diet Center, and Zahava Turner, RD, CSP, LDN, a pediatric ketogenic dietician. They will discuss:

- History, safety, and effectiveness of ketogenic diets in epilepsy
- What are the components of a ketogenic diet?
- Who is a good candidate for dietary therapy?
- Working with a dietary therapy team
- Latest developments in dietary therapy in epilepsy

sea. They must carefully check their equipment before their expeditions, consistently monitor their remaining oxygen levels, and take action to get themselves to safety before they run out of the air they need to survive. And, crucially, scuba divers use the buddy system; they do not dive alone.”

Avoid neglecting your routine medical exams, getting stressed out, eating poorly, or waiting until things become an emergency. Caregivers need to tend daily and regularly to their own emotional, physical, and financial needs to be able to provide the best quality of care for their loved ones. They should also set up a community of caring, get support, and “not dive alone.”

Frazel also points out the importance of caregivers taking an active role in their wellbeing and resilience. “There is one last thing about this scuba metaphor that I prefer to the one about the airplane oxygen masks: scuba divers have agency. As metaphorical scuba divers, we can plan our actions, we can control the depths to which we dive, we can change course if need be, and we can grow more skilled through experience.”

ON PREPARING FOR AND COPING WITH DISASTER
by Jenny LaBaw, Wellness Institute Program Manager

Life has a way of presenting harrowing situations such as trauma, natural disasters, or accidents. These trials bring on many emotions and unusual stress. You may experience feelings of disbelief and feel scared, disoriented, violated, angry, confused, depressed, and powerless. People may experience changes in weight, headaches, stomachaches, difficulty sleeping, and excessive drug or alcohol use. Emotionally, it can be hard to bounce back from such trauma. Physically, you may be looking for new transportation, housing, and medical resources. Mentally, trying to understand the short-term or long-term impact as well as grasp how to move forward can be difficult.

On November 8, 2018, my northern California community was forever changed by the Camp Fire, the most devastating fire in California’s history. Although evacuated for days, not knowing what was going to happen, my home and family were spared by the fire thanks to the brave men and women on the fire line. This, unfortunately, wasn’t true for so many more. The feelings above were all too real for me personally, but they inspired me to write this article.

We all cope differently and move through difficult events at our own pace. Here are a few strategies for people living with epilepsy—try these to prepare for the unexpected.
To prepare for emergencies:

Pack a Personal Go Bag: Have a bag prepared for emergency situations including, but not limited to, several days of medication and other medical devices you may need, a change of clothes, important documents (like your seizure response plan and list of medications), a list of irreplaceable items you can grab if needed, and cash.

Pack an Emergency Kit: If you need to shelter in place, this kit may include water (1 gallon of water per person for 3 days), food (3 days of nonperishable goods), manual can opener, flashlights (with charged batteries), extra batteries, first-aid kit, whistle, N95 masks, and an emergency blanket.

Animal/Pet Kit: Remember to have a bag packed for your dear pet to make it easier to evacuate. This kit can include similar items (food, medications, a familiar toy, etc.).

To cope during and after disaster:

Seek Support: Talk with others who also experienced the disaster, friends you trust, or a professional counselor. Talking about your feelings and emotions can help you move through them.

Exercise and Eat Well: Exercise can provide stress relief and increase your dopamine (feel good hormone) levels. Eating healthy, nutritious foods will help keep your energy levels regulated and immune system strong. Avoid excessive alcohol consumption as well as sugar and processed food consumption. *Note: always consult with your medical team before engaging in physical activity or making dietary changes.

Adequate Rest/Sleep: Our bodies recover when we let them rest. This goes for physical, emotional, and mental recovery. Find time to relax, take deep breaths, and be gentle with your body and mind.

Get Back to Normal: As soon as it feels like the right time for you, get back into your usual routine in any capacity you can.

Reflect: Reflecting on past traumatic events and how you managed to work through them can help you move forward and decide future steps to take. Also, focus on the positive things in your life that you have to look forward to and be thankful for.

Ask for Help: If you are finding it hard to work through your emotions or are feeling helpless or suicidal, ask for help. Call 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) any time for help if you are struggling.
ON EATING HEALTHY FOODS

Although you might be trying to eat healthier, some foods that you think (or are told) are healthy may actually do more harm than good. Hidden sugars or salt can lurk in the foods that are advertised as healthy.

**Yogurt** contains calcium, protein, and live cultures. However, a lot of processed yogurts are loaded with sugar. Consider whole fat, plain yogurt and add fresh berries or nuts.

**Salads** can start out healthy with leafy greens and a variety of nutrient-dense vegetables, such as broccoli and beets. But most dressings are loaded with sugars and poor-quality oils. Consider using olive oil and vinegar instead. Also, be aware of adding croutons, bacon bits, and caramelized nuts, which may add poor-quality fats, refined sugar, and empty calories.

**Granola bars** may come loaded with sugar and covered in chocolate, making them nothing more than a glorified candy bar. Look for granola bars that have no added sugar and are high in fiber. If it tastes like a candy bar, it’s probably a candy bar.

**Microwave popcorn**, especially the flavored varieties such as cheese and kettle corn, can come with a lot of added salt, sugar, artificial chemicals, and poor-quality fat. For a healthier snack, consider air-popped popcorn, and if you want some added flavor, sprinkle on mineral salt.

**Dried fruit** has a lot of concentrated sugar in a small package, which may make it hard for you to gauge your intake. Consider fresh fruit instead, which has fiber, water, and vitamins and can be more filling if you’re trying to watch how much you eat.

**Condiments**, such as ketchup, barbecue sauce, and jarred spaghetti sauce contain a lot of added sugar. If you want to boost the flavors of your food, add fresh ingredients such as herbs, spices, and lemon.

**Trail mix** can be loaded with candies and chocolates. You can make your own with nuts and if you want a little extra sweet, consider organic raisins without added sugar.

**Cereal**, even those with labels such as “heart healthy” and “natural” can have too much sugar. Try oatmeal with nuts and fresh fruit or scrambled eggs and veggies for your breakfast.