



Caring for Yourself

You're exhausted, overwhelmed, and probably a bit lost. Self-care is not a luxury right now. It's what will help you survive what you're going through.

First off, please recognize...

The grief you're carrying is real

When someone has dementia, you lose them in pieces: their memories, their role in your life, the conversations you used to have. By the time death is near, you may feel like you've already been grieving for years, and you probably have. This grief is real, and it's valid. It's already taken a significant toll on your mind and body long before these final days arrived.

All of your feelings are normal

Guilt for wanting to leave the room. Boredom while scrolling on your phone as someone lies beside you in their final moments of life. Anger that it's taking so long. And relief that the struggle is nearly over. None of these feelings mean you love them any less. They mean you're a normal person in the middle of a very long, very hard goodbye.

And you need to take care of yourself.

- Keep water with you and stay hydrated. Eat sources of protein, like nuts, Greek yogurt, and protein bars. When your loved one dozes off, you do the same and get some rest.
- Every hour or so, take five minutes to walk outside, walk the hallway, or splash your face with cold water. You don't have to be "on" every second.
- Say no to visitors who drain you, phone calls you don't want to take, and say yes to real help: someone bringing you a cup of coffee and a sandwich, checking on your pet, or sitting with your loved one so you can just step away and breathe for a moment.
- Use scripted responses when your brain is too tired to think: "We're taking it one hour at a time;" "I'm too tired to talk, but I appreciate you checking in."
- If the care team needs you to make a decision, ask for 15 minutes to think about it if you feel yourself "frozen" with decision fatigue.
- Reach out if the distress is unbearable.

***Taking care of yourself isn't selfish.
It's what preserves your capacity to be the calm,
loving presence your loved one needs.***

