

DR. VERA'S
DEMENTIA ACTION MANUALS

stop the burnout!

and take care of you, too



The Caregiver's Survival Manual for
Stress, Guilt and Exhaustion

DR. FERNANDO VERA, OT

DR. VERA'S DEMENTIA ACTION MANUALS • BOOK 4

STOP THE BURNOUT!

The Caregiver's Survival Manual for Stress, Guilt and Exhaustion

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StartEmpowering.com

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Important: This manual is for education and support. It does not replace medical or mental health care. If you are struggling, please talk to your doctor or a counselor. If you are in crisis or thinking about harming yourself or someone else, call or text 988. In an emergency, call 911.

Names used in the sample phrases are examples.

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A NOTE BEFORE YOU BEGIN

This book is for you.

Every other book in this series is about your loved one. This one is about you.

If you're reading this, you're probably tired in a way that's hard to explain. You may feel guilty, angry, lonely or numb, sometimes all in the same hour. You may not remember the last time someone asked how you're doing.

I've seen this in hundreds of families at my clinic. And I felt it myself caring for my mother, Virginia. Here's what I've learned: **burnout isn't a sign you're failing. It's a sign you've been carrying too much for too long.**

Fernando

Dr. Fernando Vera, OT

This manual covers 25 of the hardest parts of being a dementia caregiver: exhaustion, guilt, anger, family conflict, grief and more. Each page shows you what to think, say and do instead.

Start with the R.E.S.T. plan on page 6. Then turn to whatever you're feeling today.

You matter. Your health matters. And taking care of yourself is one of the most important things you can do for the person you love.

Check in. Take a step. Follow up.

Every struggle gets a two-page spread. The left page helps you recognize what you're feeling and gives you small steps to feel better. The right page gives you the words to say, a weekly commitment and when to check in with yourself again.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

How this kind of burnout shows up in your day, so you know you're on the right page.

1 • QUICK CHECK

A short checklist. Tick what applies to your family to see if this page is for you.

3 • WHAT TO SAY

Word-for-word phrases you can use right away.

4 • FOLLOW UP

When to check again, and when to call a professional.

WHY IT HAPPENS

The reasons behind it. Knowing the reason helps you stop blaming yourself.

2 • ACTION PLAN

Four small steps, from 5 minutes to this month.

THIS WEEK I WILL...

Pick one small commitment for the week, or write your own.

Dr. Vera's tip

One practical trick from the clinic and from caring for my own mother.

☐ DO THIS NOW

☐ DO THIS MONTH

☐ WHEN YOU CAN

Every topic has a badge so you know what matters most.

Three rules that apply to every page

1. You can't pour from an empty cup.
2. Asking for help is a skill, not a weakness.
3. Good enough is good enough.

Recharge with **R.E.S.T.**

Burnout doesn't happen in a day, and it doesn't go away in a day. These four steps help you get your strength back.

R Recognize the signs

- Always tired
- Snapping or crying easily
- Losing interest in your life
- Getting sick more often

E Enlist help

- Make a help list
- Ask for specific tasks
- Accept help that's 'good enough'
- Find a support group

S Schedule breaks

- A daily 20-minute break
- A weekly half-day off
- Regular respite
- Plan it in ink

T Tend to your health

- Sleep
- Meals and water
- Your own doctor visits
- Movement every day

Taking care of you is taking care of them.

BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE

Some signs mean you need help today.

Burnout is common. But some signs mean you or your loved one may be at risk. If you see these, reach out now.

Warning signs of burnout

- ✓ Exhausted even after sleep
- ✓ Feeling hopeless or trapped
- ✓ Pulling away from friends
- ✓ Anger you can't control
- ✓ Getting sick often
- ✓ Drinking more to cope
- ✓ Losing interest in everything

Get help right away if

- ! You have thoughts of harming yourself
- ! You feel you might hurt your loved one
- ! You've hit, shaken or pushed them
- ! You can't provide safe care anymore
- ! You haven't slept or eaten for days

Call or text 988. The Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is free and open 24/7. For dementia caregiving support, call the Alzheimer's Association at 1-800-272-3900.

988

part one

Recognize Burnout



Exhaustion, guilt, anger and anxiety: naming what you feel is the first step.

In this part

- | | | |
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-

Remember R.E.S.T.

Recognize the signs • **E**nlist help • **S**chedule breaks • **T**end to your health

01

Exhausted All the Time

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Tired when you wake up, running on caffeine, forgetting things, snapping at people, dreading each day.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Caregiving is a 24/7 job with no days off. Broken sleep and constant alertness drain your body and mind.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ You wake up tired even after sleeping. | ☐ You snap at people more than usual. |
| ☐ You rely on caffeine to get through the day. | ☐ You dread the start of each day. |
| ☐ You forget things or make small mistakes. | ☐ You haven't had a real break in weeks. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Write down everything you did yesterday.

Seeing the list shows you why you're tired, and what could go.

5 MIN

2

Cross off one task that isn't essential this week.

Something can wait, be skipped, or be done 'good enough.'

TODAY

3

Put a 20-minute daily break on the calendar in ink.

Treat it like a doctor's appointment.

THIS WEEK

4

Ask one person for a specific block of help.

'Can you cover Thursday from 2 to 4?'

THIS WEEK

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

01 Exhausted All the Time

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

To yourself: "I'm doing the best I can."

To family: "I'm running on empty. I need help."

To your doctor: "I'm exhausted and it isn't getting better."

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Take a 20-minute break every day.
- ☐ Go to bed 30 minutes earlier three nights.
- ☐ Ask one person for help with one task.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Rate your energy from 1 to 10 today, then again in two weeks. Is it moving up?

GET HELP IF

Exhaustion lasts for weeks, you feel hopeless, or you're making mistakes with their care or your driving. If you're in crisis, call or text 988.

Dr. Vera's tip

Put your break on the calendar in ink, like a doctor's appointment. If it isn't scheduled, it won't happen.

02

Guilt: Never Doing Enough

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Feeling guilty when you take a break, when you lose patience, when you want your old life back, or when you can't 'fix' it.

WHY IT HAPPENS

You love them and you can't stop the disease. Guilt fills the gap between what you want and what's possible.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ You feel guilty when you take a break. | ☐ You replay mistakes over and over. |
| ☐ You feel you should be doing more. | ☐ You turn down help because you 'should' do it. |
| ☐ You feel guilty for wishing things were different. | ☐ You compare yourself to other caregivers. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Write down three things you did well today.

Guilt only shows you the misses. Balance it.

5 MIN

2

Say out loud: 'I'm doing what one person can do.'

Say it every time guilt shows up.

TODAY

3

Tell one person how guilty you feel.

Saying it out loud shrinks it.

THIS WEEK

4

Join a caregiver support group.

Others will tell you they feel it too.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

02 Guilt: Never Doing Enough

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

To yourself: "Good enough is good enough."

To a friend: "I need to vent for a minute, not advice."

To your loved one: "I love you. I'll be back soon."

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Write three wins each night.
- ☐ Take one break without apologizing.
- ☐ Share how I feel with one person.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Look back at your wins notebook. Did guilt show up less often?

GET HELP IF

Guilt keeps you from sleeping, eating or getting help, or you feel worthless. Talk to your doctor or a counselor.

Dr. Vera's tip

Ask yourself: 'Would I judge my best friend this harshly?' Then give yourself the same answer you'd give them.

03

Anger and Resentment

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Feeling angry at your loved one, at family who don't help, at the disease, or at the life you've lost.

WHY IT HAPPENS

You've given up a lot, you're tired, and things are unfair. Anger is a normal response to loss and overload.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ You feel angry at your loved one. | ☐ Small things set you off. |
| ☐ You're resentful of family who don't help. | ☐ You feel angry, then ashamed. |
| ☐ You've yelled or slammed doors. | ☐ Anger is worse when you're tired or hungry. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Notice your warning signs: tight jaw, fast heart, clenched hands.

Catching it early gives you a choice.

5 MIN

2

Leave the room for 60 seconds when anger hits 7 out of 10.

Walk away first, fix it later.

TODAY

3

Tell family exactly what you need from them.

Resentment grows when needs stay unspoken.

THIS WEEK

4

Add regular breaks so anger doesn't build.

Anger is often exhaustion in disguise.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

03 Anger and Resentment

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

To yourself: "This is hard, and it's okay to feel angry."

To your loved one: "Let's take a break."

To family: "I'm resentful that I'm doing this alone. I need you to help."

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Pick a cool-down spot and use it.
- ☐ Ask one family member for specific help.
- ☐ Take one real break.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Count how many times you walked away instead of exploding. That's progress.

GET HELP IF

You feel close to hurting them or yourself, or your anger is frightening you. Step away now and call or text 988, or the Alzheimer's Association helpline at 1-800-272-3900.

Dr. Vera's tip

Keep a simple rule: when anger hits a 7 out of 10, you leave the room. Walk away first, fix it later.

04 Losing Yourself

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

You don't remember the last time you did something for fun. Your whole life is appointments, pills and care.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Caregiving slowly takes over your time, your friendships and your sense of who you are.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ You can't remember the last time you had fun. | ☐ You feel like you've disappeared. |
| ☐ Your life is appointments, pills and care. | ☐ You say 'maybe later' to every invitation. |
| ☐ You've dropped hobbies and friends. | ☐ You feel numb or empty. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

List five things you used to love.

Small or big: coffee with a friend, gardening, music.

5 MIN

2

Do one small thing from the list this week.

Even 20 minutes counts.

THIS WEEK

3

Put a weekly 'me time' block on the calendar.

Protect it like an appointment.

THIS WEEK

4

Keep one friendship active with a weekly call.

Connection brings you back to yourself.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

04 Losing Yourself

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

To yourself: "What used to make me happy?"

To a friend: "Let's have coffee next week."

To family: "I need two hours a week for me."

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Do one thing I used to love.
- ☐ Call one old friend.
- ☐ Plan something to look forward to.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 1 MONTH

Did you do something just for you each week this month?

GET HELP IF

You feel empty, numb or hopeless most days. Talk to your doctor or a counselor.

Dr. Vera's tip

Put a photo of yourself doing something you love where you'll see it every day. It's a reminder that you're still in there.

05

Anxiety and Constant Dread

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Worrying all the time about the next crisis, the next fall, money or the future; trouble relaxing even when things are calm.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Dementia is unpredictable, and you're always on alert. Your body stays in 'emergency mode.'

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ You worry constantly about the next crisis. | ☐ Your heart races or your chest feels tight. |
| ☐ You can't relax even when things are calm. | ☐ You check on them over and over. |
| ☐ You lie awake running 'what if' scenarios. | ☐ You feel on edge most of the time. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Take five slow breaths, out longer than in.

It tells your body you're safe.

5 MIN

2

Write your biggest worry and one step you can take.

Then close the notebook.

TODAY

3

Write an emergency plan for the crisis you fear most.

A plan turns worry into action.

THIS WEEK

4

Talk to your doctor or a counselor about anxiety.

It's treatable.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

05 Anxiety and Constant Dread

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

To yourself: "I can handle the next hour."

To your doctor: "My anxiety is getting worse."

To a friend: "I'm worried about the future. Can we talk?"

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Start a worry notebook.
- ☐ Write one emergency plan.
- ☐ Practice slow breathing daily.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Rate your anxiety from 1 to 10. If it's still high, call your doctor.

GET HELP IF

Anxiety keeps you from sleeping, eating or functioning, or you have panic attacks. Your doctor can help.

Dr. Vera's tip

Keep a 'worry notebook.' Write the worry, then one step you can take. Close the book and put it away.

part two

Get Help



How to ask for help, handle family and find support that makes a real difference.

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Remember R.E.S.T.

Recognize the signs • **E**nlist help • **S**chedule breaks • **T**end to your health

06

Asking for Help (and Accepting It)

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Saying 'I'm fine' when you're not, turning down offers, or feeling like no one can do it right.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Pride, guilt, not wanting to be a burden, or believing you're the only one who can do it.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ You say 'I'm fine' when you're not. | ☐ You feel like a burden asking. |
| ☐ You turn down offers of help. | ☐ People offer help but you never give them a task. |
| ☐ You feel no one can do it right. | ☐ You're doing everything alone. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Make a help list of tasks others can do.

Meals, rides, errands, calls, sitting with them.

5 MIN

2

Next time someone offers, pick a task from the list.

'Actually, yes. Could you...?'

TODAY

3

Share the list with family in a group text.

Make it easy to say yes.

THIS WEEK

4

Accept help that's 'good enough.'

It doesn't have to be perfect to give you a break.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

06 Asking for Help (and Accepting It)

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

"Could you pick up groceries this week?"

"Could you call Dad on Sundays?"

"Would you take them to the doctor next month?"

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Make my help list.
- ☐ Ask for help with one specific task.
- ☐ Say 'yes, thank you' to one offer.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

How many tasks did someone else do this week? Aim for more next week.

GET HELP IF

You have no one to help and you're struggling. Call the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 to find local support.

Dr. Vera's tip

When someone says 'Let me know if you need anything,' pull out your list and say, 'Actually, yes.'



Family Members Who Don't Help

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Siblings who live far away, offer opinions but not time, or say 'You're better at this.'

WHY IT HAPPENS

Distance, denial, fear, old family roles, or not understanding how hard it really is.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Siblings live far away and rarely help. | ☐ You keep score silently. |
| ☐ Family gives opinions but not time. | ☐ Family doesn't know how hard it is. |
| ☐ They say 'You're better at this.' | ☐ You feel resentful and alone. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Keep a one-week care diary.

It shows the family exactly what the job involves.

THIS WEEK

2

Write a list of needs and send it before a family meeting.

Clear asks get clear answers.

THIS WEEK

3

Hold a family meeting, in person or by video.

Ask each person to pick specific tasks.

THIS MONTH

4

Give long-distance family remote jobs.

Bills, calls, research, or money for respite.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

07 Family Members Who Don't Help

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

"Here's what a typical week looks like."

"Which of these can you take on?"

"Can you cover my respite care costs one weekend a month?"

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Start a one-week care diary.
- ☐ Send a list of needs to family.
- ☐ Schedule a family meeting.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 1 MONTH

Did each family member follow through on their task? If not, follow up clearly.

GET HELP IF

Family conflict is affecting your health or their care. A social worker or family counselor can help.

Dr. Vera's tip

Ask the doctor or a care manager to explain the situation to the family. They listen differently to a professional.

08

Hiring In-Home Help

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Unsure whether to hire help, how to find someone, or how to pay for it.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Cost, trust, guilt and not knowing where to start keep many families from getting help.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ You're doing all the hands-on care yourself. | ☐ You feel guilty about bringing in a stranger. |
| ☐ You're unsure how to find reliable help. | ☐ Your loved one refuses outside help. |
| ☐ You worry about cost. | ☐ You're close to your physical limit. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Write an 'All About Me' page for any helper.

Routines, likes, triggers and what calms them.

TODAY

2

Call two home care agencies with the same questions.

Ask about dementia training and consistent caregivers.

THIS WEEK

3

Ask about programs that help pay, like GUIDE respite.

Call your Area Agency on Aging.

THIS WEEK

4

Start with a few hours while you're home.

Introduce the helper as your friend.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

08 Hiring In-Home Help

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

"Do you have dementia training?"

"Can the same person come each visit?"

"What happens if the caregiver is sick?"

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Write the 'All About Me' page.
- ☐ Call two agencies.
- ☐ Book a first short visit.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN AFTER 3 VISITS

How is your loved one adjusting? Give it a few weeks before deciding.

GET HELP IF

You can't safely care for them alone anymore. Talk to their doctor about care options.

Dr. Vera's tip

Write an 'All About Me' page: favorite foods, music, routines, triggers, what calms them. It makes any helper better on day one.



Respite: Adult Day Programs and Short Stays

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Hearing about respite but not knowing what it is, feeling guilty using it, or thinking you can't afford it.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Respite is simply a break for you, while someone else safely cares for your loved one.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ You haven't had a break in months. | ☐ You feel guilty using it. |
| ☐ You don't know what respite is. | ☐ Your loved one might enjoy an adult day program. |
| ☐ You think respite is too expensive. | ☐ You use every break for chores. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Look up adult day programs near you.

Many offer a free trial day.

TODAY

2

Ask about GUIDE, Medicaid waivers and VA respite.

Programs can help pay.

THIS WEEK

3

Visit one program and ask questions.

Activities, staff training, behavior support.

THIS WEEK

4

Schedule your first respite day and plan something restful.

Don't fill it with errands.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

09

Respite: Adult Day Programs and Short Stays

continued

3

WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctorsay
this*"What activities do you offer?"**"How do you handle behaviors?"**"Can we visit before we start?"*

+

THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Call one respite program.
- ☐ Book one respite day.
- ☐ Plan something restful for it.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4

FOLLOW UP**CHECK AGAIN IN 1 MONTH**

Are you getting regular breaks? Aim for at least one a week.

GET HELP IF

You need a break but can't find one. Call the Eldercare Locator: 1-800-677-1116.

Dr. Vera's tip

Plan your respite day before it arrives. If you don't, it fills with errands.

10 Finding a Support Group

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Feeling like no one understands, or that other people's lives are normal while yours has fallen apart.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Dementia caregiving is isolating. People who haven't lived it often don't understand.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ You feel like no one understands. | ☐ You've never tried a support group. |
| ☐ You don't know other caregivers. | ☐ You think you don't have time. |
| ☐ Friends don't get what you're going through. | ☐ You feel alone with your feelings. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Search for local and online caregiver groups.

The Alzheimer's Association lists many.

TODAY

2

Pick one meeting and put it on the calendar.

Online groups meet in the evening too.

THIS WEEK

3

Share one struggle at your first meeting.

You'll be surprised how many nod.

THIS MONTH

4

Try a second group if the first isn't right.

Every group has a different feel.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

10 Finding a Support Group

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

"Hi, I'm caring for my mom with dementia."

"I'm not sure what to say yet."

"Has anyone dealt with this?"

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Find one support group.
- ☐ Attend one meeting.
- ☐ Exchange numbers with one caregiver.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 1 MONTH

Did you attend at least two meetings?
How did you feel afterward?

GET HELP IF

You feel alone and hopeless. Please talk
to a counselor or call 988.

Dr. Vera's tip

Online groups meet at night too. Join one after bedtime from your couch.



Talking to Your Doctor About You

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Your appointments are all about them. No one asks how you're doing.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Caregivers often ignore their own health until it breaks down.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Your doctor doesn't know you're a caregiver. | ☐ You feel anxious or down most days. |
| ☐ You haven't had a checkup in over a year. | ☐ You have back or joint pain from lifting. |
| ☐ You have symptoms you've ignored. | ☐ No one asks how you're doing. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Write a list of your symptoms and concerns.

Sleep, mood, pain, stress.

5 MIN

2

Book your own checkup.

Schedule it on the same day as theirs if that's easier.

THIS WEEK

3

Tell your doctor: 'I'm a full-time dementia caregiver.'

It changes the conversation.

THIS MONTH

4

Ask about depression and anxiety screening.

And a counseling referral if needed.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

11 Talking to Your Doctor About You

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

"I'm not sleeping."

"I feel anxious and down."

"My back hurts from lifting."

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Book my checkup.
- ☐ Write my symptom list.
- ☐ Tell my doctor I'm a caregiver.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN AFTER YOUR VISIT

Did you get a plan for your own health?
Put follow-ups on the calendar.

GET HELP IF

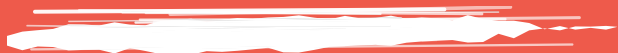
You have chest pain, severe symptoms,
or thoughts of harming yourself. Get
help now.

Dr. Vera's tip

Book your checkup on the same day as theirs. One trip, two doctors.

part three

Protect Your Health



Sleep, food, movement and your own doctor: the basics that keep you going.

In this part

12	Not Sleeping	p. 36
13	Skipping Your Own Doctor Visits	p. 38
14	Eating Poorly and No Time to Move	p. 40
15	Drinking or Numbing to Cope	p. 42
16	Depression	p. 44

Remember R.E.S.T.

Recognize the signs • **E**nlist help • **S**chedule breaks • **T**end to your health

12

Not Sleeping

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Up with them at night, lying awake worrying, or never sleeping deeply because you're listening for them.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Night waking, anxiety and always being 'on call' destroy caregiver sleep.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ You're woken up most nights. | ☐ You're exhausted during the day. |
| ☐ You sleep in a chair by their bed. | ☐ You've nodded off while driving. |
| ☐ You lie awake worrying. | ☐ No one else covers nights. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Nap when they nap, even 20 minutes.

Rest is part of the job.

TODAY

2

Set up a monitor and sleep in your own bed.

You'll hear them and rest better.

THIS WEEK

3

Ask a family member to take one night a week.

One full night can reset your week.

THIS WEEK

4

Work on their sleep, too.

See Stop the 3 A.M. Madness! for the 24-hour reset.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

12 Not Sleeping

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

To yourself: "Sleep is part of the job."

To family: "I need one night of full sleep."

To your doctor: "I'm not sleeping."

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Take one nap.
- ☐ Set up a monitor.
- ☐ Get one full night of sleep.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Count your hours of sleep. If you're still exhausted, look for overnight help.

GET HELP IF

You're falling asleep while driving or making mistakes. Get help now.

Dr. Vera's tip

Trade one night a week with a family member. Protect it like an appointment.

13

Skipping Your Own Doctor Visits

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Postponing checkups, screenings, dental visits or refills because there's no time or no one to cover for you.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Their appointments always feel more urgent than yours, and finding someone to cover is one more job.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ You've canceled your own appointments. | ☐ You've run out of your own medications. |
| ☐ You're behind on screenings or dental care. | ☐ You ignore new symptoms. |
| | ☐ No one covers for you to go. |
| | ☐ You haven't had a flu shot or vaccines. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

List your overdue appointments and screenings.

Dental, eye, checkup, mammogram, colonoscopy.

5 MIN

2

Book the most overdue one.

Put it on the family calendar.

THIS WEEK

3

Arrange coverage or use telehealth.

Ask family or book a respite day.

THIS WEEK

4

Set refill reminders for your own medications.

Your health matters to their care.

TODAY

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

13

Skipping Your Own Doctor Visits

continued

3

WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

To your doctor: "I'm a full-time caregiver. Can we do this by video?"

To family: "I need coverage for my own appointment."

To yourself: "If I go down, who takes care of them?"

+

THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Book one overdue appointment.
- ☐ Set refill reminders.
- ☐ Arrange coverage for my visit.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4

FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 1 MONTH

Are your own appointments back on track?

GET HELP IF

You have symptoms you've been ignoring, or you've missed screenings for more than a year. Make the call this week.

Dr. Vera's tip

Put your appointments on the calendar in the same color as theirs. You'd never skip theirs, so don't skip yours.



Eating Poorly and No Time to Move

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Eating standing up, skipping meals, living on snacks and coffee, and no time for any exercise.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Every minute goes to their care, and you're too tired to cook or move at the end of the day.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ You eat standing up or skip meals. | ☐ You're gaining or losing weight. |
| ☐ You live on snacks and coffee. | ☐ You feel sluggish and low. |
| ☐ You haven't exercised in months. | ☐ You drink little water. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Fill a water bottle every morning.

Keep it with you.

5 MIN

2

Sit down for lunch with your loved one.

You both eat better together.

TODAY

3

Take a 10-minute walk together daily.

Ten minutes counts.

THIS WEEK

4

Batch-cook or ask friends for meals.

A freezer meal is a gift.

THIS WEEK

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

14 Eating Poorly and No Time to Move

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

"Let's eat lunch together at the table."

"Let's walk to the mailbox and back."

To family: "Could you drop off a meal this week?"

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Eat one sit-down meal a day.
- ☐ Walk 10 minutes a day.
- ☐ Ask a friend for a meal.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Notice your energy. Small changes add up.

GET HELP IF

You're losing or gaining weight quickly, feel weak, or have new health problems. See your doctor.

Dr. Vera's tip

Ask friends who offer help for a meal instead of a visit. A casserole in the freezer is a gift that keeps giving.

15

Drinking or Numbing to Cope

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

More wine at night, extra pills, hours on your phone or TV, anything to escape for a little while.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Constant stress and no breaks push anyone toward quick relief. Over time it can make exhaustion and sadness worse.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ You drink more than you used to. | ☐ You hide how much you use. |
| ☐ You look forward to the evening drink to cope. | ☐ You've driven after drinking. |
| ☐ You use pills to relax or sleep. | ☐ You feel you can't stop. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Track your drinks or pills honestly for one week.

Awareness is the first step.

TODAY

2

Pick two other ways to unwind in the evening.

A walk, a shower, a call to a friend.

THIS WEEK

3

Tell one trusted person.

Saying it out loud opens the door to support.

THIS WEEK

4

Talk to your doctor or call SAMHSA at 1-800-662-4357.

Help is confidential.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

15 Drinking or Numbing to Cope

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

To yourself: "What do I really need right now?"

To your doctor: "I'm using alcohol to cope with stress."

To a friend: "Can you check on me this week?"

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Track my drinking for a week.
- ☐ Try two other ways to unwind.
- ☐ Talk to someone I trust.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Is your use going down? If not, reach out for professional help.

GET HELP IF

You can't cut back, you're drinking during the day, or it's affecting their care. Talk to your doctor or call the SAMHSA helpline at 1-800-662-4357.

Dr. Vera's tip

Before you reach for a drink, ask yourself: 'What do I need?' Most of the time the answer is rest, food or someone to talk to.

16 Depression

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Sad or empty most days, crying easily, no joy in things you used to love, trouble sleeping or eating, feeling hopeless.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Dementia caregivers have high rates of depression. Constant stress, loss and isolation wear down anyone. It's not weakness.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ You feel sad or empty most days. | ☐ Your sleep or appetite has changed. |
| ☐ You've lost interest in things you enjoyed. | ☐ You feel hopeless about the future. |
| ☐ You cry easily or feel numb. | ☐ You've pulled away from people. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Tell one person today how you're really doing.

Just one.

TODAY

2

Get outside in daylight for 15 minutes.

Light and movement help mood.

TODAY

3

Book a visit with your doctor.

Depression is common and very treatable.

THIS WEEK

4

Ask about counseling, in person or online.

Talking helps.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

16 Depression

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

To your doctor: "I've felt down most days for weeks."

To a friend: "I'm not okay. Can we talk?"

To yourself: "This is an illness, not a failure."

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Tell one person how I feel.
- ☐ Book a doctor visit.
- ☐ Get outside every day.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

If you still feel low, or ever think of harming yourself, call or text 988.

GET HELP IF

You feel hopeless, worthless, or have any thoughts of harming yourself. Call or text 988 right now. You don't have to be in crisis to call.

Dr. Vera's tip

Tell one person today how you're really doing. Just one. It's often the step that opens every other door.

part four

Hard Feelings



Hurtful words, grief, temper, marriage and loneliness.

In this part

17	When They Say Hurtful Things	p. 48
18	Grieving Someone Who Is Still Here	p. 50
19	Losing Your Temper	p. 52
20	Changes in Your Marriage	p. 54
21	Loneliness and Isolation	p. 56

Remember R.E.S.T.

Recognize the signs • **E**nlist help • **S**chedule breaks • **T**end to your health

17

When They Say Hurtful Things

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Insults, accusations, 'I hate you,' 'You're stealing from me,' or cruel comments about how you look or what you do.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Dementia damages the part of the brain that filters words and controls emotions. Fear and confusion come out as cruelty.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ They call you names or say cruel things. | ☐ Their words replay in your head. |
| ☐ They accuse you of stealing or lying. | ☐ You feel hurt and resentful. |
| ☐ They say they hate you. | ☐ It's worse at certain times of day. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Say to yourself: 'This is the disease talking.'

Separate the person from the disease.

5 MIN

2

Respond calmly or step away.

'I'm sorry you're upset. Let's have tea.'

TODAY

3

Note when it happens: time, hunger, pain, tiredness.

Patterns reveal triggers.

THIS WEEK

4

Tell the doctor if it's getting worse.

It may be treatable.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

17 When They Say Hurtful Things

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

To them: "I love you. I'm right here."

To yourself: "It's the disease."

To a friend: "She said something awful today. I need to let it out."

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Put an 'It's the disease' note on my mirror.
- ☐ Track when hurtful words happen.
- ☐ Vent to a friend or group.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Are the words hurting less, even if they still happen?

GET HELP IF

The words are wearing you down, or the behavior is new or getting worse. Talk to your doctor and theirs.

Dr. Vera's tip

Write 'It's the disease' on a sticky note and put it on the bathroom mirror. Read it every morning.

18

Grieving Someone Who Is Still Here

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Missing the person they used to be, sadness at each new loss, feeling like you're saying goodbye a little at a time.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Dementia brings many losses before death. This grief, often called anticipatory grief, is real and normal.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ You miss who they used to be. | ☐ You feel sad after visits. |
| ☐ Each new loss feels like a goodbye. | ☐ No one talks about this kind of grief. |
| ☐ You feel guilty for grieving someone alive. | ☐ You feel alone in your sadness. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Name it: 'I'm grieving, and that's okay.'

It's called anticipatory grief.

5 MIN

2

Write down one good moment each day.

Joy and grief can live together.

TODAY

3

Talk to a friend or group about your losses.

Sharing grief lightens it.

THIS WEEK

4

Consider a counselor who understands dementia grief.

You deserve support.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

18 Grieving Someone Who Is Still Here

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

To them: "I love you."

To yourself: "I miss who we were."

To a friend: "I'm grieving, and it's confusing."

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Start a 'good moments' jar.
- ☐ Talk to someone about my grief.
- ☐ Look at old photos with them.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 1 MONTH

Is grief overwhelming your days? If so, reach out to a counselor.

GET HELP IF

Grief is overwhelming, or you're not sleeping, eating or functioning. A counselor can help.

Dr. Vera's tip

Keep a 'good moments' jar. Each day, write one small good moment on a slip of paper. On hard days, read them.



Losing Your Temper

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Yelling, snapping, slamming a door, then feeling ashamed and guilty afterward.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Exhaustion, repeated stress and no breaks shorten anyone's fuse. It doesn't make you a bad person.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ You've yelled or snapped at them. | ☐ You worry you might hurt them. |
| ☐ You feel ashamed afterward. | ☐ Small things trigger big reactions. |
| ☐ It happens when you're exhausted. | ☐ You don't have anyone to step in. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Leave the room when you feel it rising.

Walk away first, fix it later.

5 MIN

2

Repair: 'I'm sorry. Let's start over.'

They often move on quickly.

TODAY

3

Look at what's behind it: sleep, hunger, no breaks.

Fix the cause, not just the moment.

THIS WEEK

4

Get more help and breaks in your week.

A tired caregiver has a short fuse.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

19 Losing Your Temper

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

To them: "I need a minute. I'll be right back."

To yourself: "That was a sign I need a break."

To family: "I lost my temper today. I need more help."

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Make a cool-down plan.
- ☐ Get one more break a week.
- ☐ Forgive myself for one bad moment.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

If you ever feel you might hurt them, call 988 or 1-800-272-3900 right away.

GET HELP IF

You feel you might hurt them, or you already have. Step away now and call 988 or the Alzheimer's Association at 1-800-272-3900.

Dr. Vera's tip

Walk away first, fix it later. Leaving the room is always the right move.

20

Changes in Your Marriage

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Your spouse feels like a stranger. You've lost your partner, your plans and your intimacy, but you're still married.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Dementia slowly changes roles from partners to caregiver and patient. That loss is deep and often unspoken.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Your spouse feels like a stranger. | ☐ You feel more like a nurse than a spouse. |
| ☐ You miss your partner and your plans. | ☐ You feel guilty for your feelings. |
| ☐ Intimacy has changed or ended. | ☐ You don't talk about it with anyone. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Pick one shared ritual to keep.

A song, a walk, holding hands.

TODAY

2

Find a support group for spouse caregivers.

Other spouses understand.

THIS WEEK

3

Talk to a counselor about your feelings.

It's a real loss.

THIS MONTH

4

Keep your own friendships.

You need connection too.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

20 Changes in Your Marriage

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

To your spouse: "Let's listen to our song."

To yourself: "I'm allowed to grieve what's changed."

To a counselor: "I feel like I've lost my partner."

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Keep one shared ritual.
- ☐ Find a spouse support group.
- ☐ Call a friend.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 1 MONTH

Are you feeling more supported? If not, reach out to a counselor.

GET HELP IF

You feel lost, trapped or depressed. A counselor can help you sort through it.

Dr. Vera's tip

Keep one ritual from your marriage, like a song, a walk or a favorite meal. It's a thread back to the two of you.

21

Loneliness and Isolation

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Friends have drifted away, you rarely leave the house, and days go by without a real conversation.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Caregiving limits your time and energy, and many friends don't know how to help.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Friends have drifted away. | ☐ You've declined invitations for months. |
| ☐ You rarely leave the house. | ☐ You feel ashamed of your situation. |
| ☐ Days go by without a real conversation. | ☐ You feel lonely even when people are around. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Text one friend today.

'I miss you. Can we talk this week?'

5 MIN

2

Schedule a weekly call with one friend.

Put it on the calendar.

THIS WEEK

3

Join an online caregiver group.

Community from your couch.

THIS WEEK

4

Use respite time to see people.

Not just to run errands.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

21 Loneliness and Isolation

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

"Could you come over for coffee while Mom naps?"

"Let's do a video call on Sunday."

"I'd love a walk together."

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Text one friend.
- ☐ Schedule a weekly call.
- ☐ Join an online group.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 1 MONTH

How many real conversations did you have this week? Aim for more.

GET HELP IF

You feel hopeless or very alone. Please reach out to a counselor, a support line, or call or text 988.

Dr. Vera's tip

Put a weekly call with one friend on the calendar. Treat it like an appointment you can't miss.

part five

Plan Ahead



Work, boundaries, backup plans and big decisions.

In this part

- | | | |
|-----------|--|-------|
| 22 | Juggling Work and Caregiving | p. 60 |
| 23 | Setting Boundaries and Saying No | p. 62 |
| 24 | A Backup Plan If You Get Sick | p. 64 |
| 25 | Deciding About More Care Without Guilt | p. 66 |
-

Remember R.E.S.T.

Recognize the signs • **E**nlist help • **S**chedule breaks • **T**end to your health



Juggling Work and Caregiving

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Missing work, worrying about your job, using up vacation and sick days, being distracted at work.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Caregiving and work demands collide, and many caregivers don't know what options they have.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ You're missing work for caregiving. | ☐ You're distracted at work. |
| ☐ You worry about losing your job. | ☐ You haven't told your employer. |
| ☐ You've used up vacation or sick days. | ☐ You're thinking about quitting. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

List your work options: remote days, shifted hours, leave.

Know what to ask for.

TODAY

2

Talk to HR about flexibility and FMLA.

Eligible workers may get job-protected leave.

THIS WEEK

3

Ask about your Employee Assistance Program.

Many offer free counseling and resources.

THIS WEEK

4

Set up backup care for work days.

A plan reduces emergencies.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

22 Juggling Work and Caregiving

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

"Could I work from home some days?"

"What leave options are available to me?"

"Could I shift my hours?"

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Talk to HR.
- ☐ Look up our Employee Assistance Program.
- ☐ Set up backup care.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 1 MONTH

Is work more manageable? If not, look at more care support.

GET HELP IF

You're at risk of losing your job or income. A social worker or care manager can help you plan.

Dr. Vera's tip

Ask HR about your Employee Assistance Program. Many offer free counseling and caregiver resources.

23

Setting Boundaries and Saying No

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Saying yes to every request, taking on every task, and having no time left for yourself.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Guilt, pressure from family and wanting to be a 'good' caregiver make it hard to say no.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ You say yes to every request. | ☐ You have no time for yourself. |
| ☐ You feel you can't say no. | ☐ You feel resentful after saying yes. |
| ☐ Others decide your schedule. | ☐ You apologize for having needs. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Write down your limits.

What you can and can't do each week.

5 MIN

2

Practice 'No, but thank you for asking.'

Say it out loud until it feels natural.

TODAY

3

Say no to one small thing this week.

Start small.

THIS WEEK

4

Protect your break time from all requests.

Your break is a boundary.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN · TODAY · THIS WEEK · THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

23 Setting Boundaries and Saying No

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this*"That won't work for me."**"I need to rest this weekend."**"Let's find another way to handle that."*

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Write my limits.
- ☐ Say no to one thing.
- ☐ Protect one break.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Did saying no get easier? Notice how you felt afterward.

GET HELP IF

You feel overwhelmed and can't say no to anyone. A counselor can help you set limits.

Dr. Vera's tip

Practice saying 'No, but thank you for asking' out loud. It gets easier every time.

24

A Backup Plan If You Get Sick

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Worrying about what happens to your loved one if you're sick, injured or in the hospital.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Many caregivers have no backup plan until a crisis forces one.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ No one knows their routine but you. | ☐ You worry about getting sick. |
| ☐ No one knows their medications. | ☐ There's no written plan. |
| ☐ You don't have a backup caregiver. | ☐ You've never talked to family about it. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Write their daily routine and medications.

One page anyone can follow.

TODAY

2

Ask one or two people to be backups.

'If I get sick, can you step in?'

THIS WEEK

3

Put everything in a caregiver binder by the door.

Routine, meds, doctors, contacts, 'All About Me.'

THIS WEEK

4

Share copies with backups and update every few months.

A plan only works if people know it.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN • TODAY • THIS WEEK • THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

24 A Backup Plan If You Get Sick

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

"Here's the plan if I can't be here."

"Can you be the backup caregiver?"

"Here's their daily routine."

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Write the daily routine.
- ☐ Ask one backup caregiver.
- ☐ Build the caregiver binder.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN EVERY 3 MONTHS

Update the binder and check that backups still have current copies.

GET HELP IF

You don't have anyone to be your backup. Call the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 to find local help.

Dr. Vera's tip

Keep a caregiver binder by the door with everything a backup would need: routine, meds, doctors and 'All About Me.'

25

Deciding About More Care Without Guilt

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Wondering if it's time for memory care, a nursing home or full-time help, and feeling guilty for even thinking about it.

WHY IT HAPPENS

As dementia progresses, needs can grow beyond what one person can safely provide at home.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like you?

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Care needs are growing beyond what you can do. | ☐ You've thought about memory care but feel guilty. |
| ☐ Nights and safety are becoming unmanageable. | ☐ You promised 'never' to a nursing home. |
| ☐ Your health is suffering. | ☐ You haven't looked at options. |

Checked 3 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Small steps, starting now

1

Say to yourself: 'Getting more care is still caring.'

It's a safety choice, not abandonment.

5 MIN

2

Talk to the doctor and a social worker about options.

Get an honest view of needs.

THIS WEEK

3

Visit two or three places before a crisis.

Planning gives you choices.

THIS MONTH

4

Make a transition plan with family.

Who, when, how, and how often you'll visit.

THIS MONTH

5 MIN · TODAY · THIS WEEK · THIS MONTH = how soon to do each step

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

25 Deciding About More Care Without Guilt

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY To yourself, your family and your doctor

say
this

"This place has people to help you."

"I'll visit often."

"You'll be safe here."

+ THIS WEEK I WILL...

- ☐ Talk to the doctor about care needs.
- ☐ Visit one care option.
- ☐ Talk to family about a plan.
- ☐ My own idea: _____

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 1 MONTH

Are you closer to a plan? Remember: you're still their caregiver in a new role.

GET HELP IF

Care at home is no longer safe for them or for you. Talk to the doctor and a social worker.

Dr. Vera's tip

You're still their caregiver in a new role: advocate, visitor and family. That role matters just as much.

My weekly recharge plan

Plan one break every day, even a small one. Write down who covers for you, and how you felt afterward.

Day	My break	Who covers	How I felt after	Done?

Tip: if a break gets canceled, reschedule it right away. Don't let it disappear.

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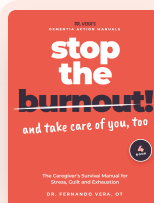
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Stop the Chaos!
What to Say and Do to Defuse 40 Challenging Dementia Behaviors



BOOK 2
Stop the 3 A.M. Madness!
What to Say and Do to End Sundowning, Night Wandering and Sleepless Nights



BOOK 3
Stop the Falls!
An OT's Room-by-Room Plan to Prevent Falls and Injuries at Home



BOOK 4
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about the author

Dr. Fernando Vera, OT



Dr. Fernando Vera is a licensed occupational therapist and the owner and clinical director of Empower Health, a clinic specializing in dementia care. He and his team help families find support, reduce caregiver burnout and unlock benefits most never discover, including enrollment in Medicare's GUIDE Program for people living with dementia.

His work is personal. His mother, Virginia, was healthy and active when she was diagnosed with Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, a rapidly progressing form of dementia. Caring for her taught him what no textbook could: caregivers need clear, practical answers they can use in the moment.

He is also the creator of the Dementia Behavior Coach app, The Activity Idea Book and The Sundown Plan.

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