



The Importance of Regular Maintenance

by Josie Padro

Caregivers have a lot on their minds. In addition to caring for someone else, they often have a house to maintain, a car to maintain, and various appliances to keep in working order—but the two most important things to maintain are your mind and your body.

In her book *The Art of Extreme Self-Care* (Hay House, Inc., 2009), Cheryl Richardson suggests thinking of your body as a classic automobile that needs loving attention to keep running at its best.

The first step, she writes, in self-maintenance is to reflect on your current state of health. Is there something you should get checked out? A lump? An ache? A change in your usual eating pattern?

Once you've stopped to think of how you are doing, you can take steps to ensure that you stay healthy:

- Book a physical exam. These days the yearly physical exam has gone by the wayside, but health problems, such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol, can be present for a long time without showing any signs. Even if they're not bothering you, these conditions can have serious consequences if they aren't addressed. If you do have a medical condition, be sure it's being monitored by a health care provider.
- Visit the dentist. Regular visits are the best way to avoid expensive and painful dental procedures.
- See a physiotherapist. If you have back pain or a joint that's giving you trouble, you may get relief through some physiotherapy. Many extended benefit plans cover physiotherapy with a doctor's referral.
- Have an eye exam. The Canadian Ophthalmology Society advises us to see an ophthalmologist right away for any of the following symptoms: pain, swelling, discharge in or around your eyes, as well as any changes in your vision, visual field, or colour perception.
- Check your hearing. The Public Health Agency of Canada recommends having a hearing test every two years.

- Look after your feet. Those with diabetes, poor circulation or other medical conditions have to make a special effort to keep their feet free from wounds and infection. That means investing in comfortable shoes and paying attention to any painful areas. Check your feet every day and see your health care practitioner, podiatrist or foot care nurse if any problems arise.
- Get screened. Women in BC between the ages of 40 and 70 are eligible for free yearly mammograms as part of the BC Cancer Agency's Screening Mammography program.
- Results are mailed to you and you are sent a reminder when your next one is due. To book an appointment, call 604-877-6187 or visit www.smpbc.ca
- The BC Cancer Agency recommends women have regular Pap tests yearly for three consecutive years; if there are no abnormal results they can be done every two years. Pap tests may not be necessary after age 69 if you've never had an abnormal result.
- The BC Cancer Agency advises men over age 55 to consider Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) testing. Find out more about PSA screening at the BC Cancer Agency website, www.bccancer.bc.ca
- The Art of Extreme Self-Care is available at North Vancouver District Public Library and the West Vancouver Memorial Library.

Caregiving fact:

"26% of Canadians report having cared for a family member or close friend with a serious health problem in the last 12 months, with 22% of these people missing one or more months of work and 41% using personal savings."

—Canadian Caregiver Coalition, 2008

The Caregiver Support Program offers a range of programs and activities:

- family caregiver network groups
- stress management and relaxation workshops
- telephone support and individual consultation
- educational workshops
- information and referral to community services
- library with books, videos, and other educational resources