Michael J. Fox: This is Michael J. Fox. Thanks for listening to this podcast. Learn more about The Michael J. Fox Foundation's work and how you can help speed a cure at michaeljfox.org.

Intro: You're listening to audio from one of our Ask the MD videos. In this series, a movement disorder specialist at The Michael J. Fox Foundation addresses common questions about living with Parkinson's disease.

Rachel Dolhun, MD: I'm Dr. Rachel Dolhun. I work in Medical Communications at The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's research. Today, I'll be talking about caregiving and Parkinson's disease.

Parkinson's is a progressive disease, which means that it gets gradually worse over time because it affects movement and also often memory. In the later stages of disease, many people will require some level of assistance. As a family member or the friend of somebody with Parkinson's, you may want or need to help out in these situations.

Caregiving will look different depending on your relationship to the person with Parkinson's and also depending on their symptoms, and their stage of disease. There are several recommendations that can help you manage as a caregiver on a daily basis.

The first is to maintain an open and honest line of communication with your partner. This way, you can figure out what's working and what's not and how you can best help each other.

The second is to stay organized. Keep a calendar of appointments and a log of significant events like falls, hospital visits, and surgeries. You should also make sure the medication list is regularly updated, and use a pill box and a medication timer to give the medication on schedule if you find that that's helpful. Make sure that the home is safe, especially if they are walking or balance problems or if memory problems are present. You can get a professional home safety evaluation, and you can also use adaptive equipment that can make daily activities like using the bathroom safer and easier.

You should also try to maintain a consistent regular daily routine and a sleep schedule. We all know how overwhelming things can seem when you're short on sleep.

Finally, although nobody likes to think this way, consider that there might be a time when you can't care for your partner safely in the home. Look into other alternative options for living arrangements like assisted living facilities early on and before they're necessary. Your doctor and a social worker can help you with this.

There are a few tips that can help you stay well as a caregiver. The first is to maintain your own identity and independence. Keep up with your regular social activities and your own hobbies. The second is to take breaks when you need them. This can be 15 minutes a day to read quietly alone or lunch out with friends once a week. Just figure out what you need to recharge and then ask your family and friends for that. Build a strong social support system. You can reach out to caregivers, support groups, that are available online and many of them also meet in person. Keep up your own health. Make it a priority. Eat a regular, healthy, balanced diet. Exercise often and keep your own scheduled medical appointments. And finally, know your own limitations. Monitor for caregiver burnout, which can show up as vague symptoms like fatigue, irritability, or depression.

You're not in this alone. Take it one step, one day, one hour at a time. You can't care for somebody else if you're not caring for yourself. You can learn more about this and other topics in Parkinson's by visiting our website.

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