Caring for a child with a chronic condition can be challenging emotionally, physically, spiritually and financially. Improving your own personal health can enhance how you care for your child and may help the health of everyone in your family. Remember, healthy families are a must for children with chronic conditions to grow up and be productive adults.

1. **Ask for help.**
   - Know the areas where others can help you and your family and be sure to let others know of the exact ways they can help you (for example, cooking a meal, running errands, etc.).
   - Often, church members, friends, neighbors and family members will be glad to help when asked.
   - Explore options for respite care with your healthcare provider (e.g., nurse, social worker).

2. **Pay attention to the basics.**
   - The way you deal (or do not deal) with stress will affect the way your children deal with stress – therefore, it could affect your health and theirs.
   - Getting enough sleep (7-9 hours/night), eating healthy foods (eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day), planning time for exercise (plan for at least 2 hours per week) and recreation are all ways to make stress easier to manage.
   - Avoid behaviors like smoking, driving fast, and drinking alcohol to reduce stress/anger.
   - Older children and equipment are often heavy. Protect your back by asking your child’s health care provider the proper way to lift and carry.
   - Stay in balance with your family. Other children, your spouse/partner, and other family members need special time with you as well.

3. **Reduce infection risks.**
   - Keep your hands clean, wash your hands with soap and water.
   - Cough or sneeze into your upper elbow not your hands.
   - Get flu vaccines for your entire family every fall.
4. **Stay connected.**
   - Your work, church, and neighborhood, that are already in the flow of your normal day, can provide you the chance to make friends. This may be difficult when you are spending a lot of time at the hospital, so be creative with ways to make and maintain friendships like on-line social networking sites.
   - Take time to do things that interest you.

5. **Prioritize and organize your time.**
   - Decide what you can realistically do in a day.
   - Look for ways to build in extra time to your day (i.e., order 3-month supplies of medicines and treatment supplies when available, prepare double amounts of a meal and freeze the extra for a busy day, carpool, etc).
   - Regularly review your child’s home care treatments with their healthcare provider looking for ways to simplify and reduce time spent on unnecessary treatments.

6. **Make your own personal health a top priority.**
   - Schedule your own health check-up when you make your child’s health appointment.
   - Watch your own health by doing monthly self-breast or testicular exams, taking notice of nagging symptoms and getting early treatment for health problems.
   - Avoiding treatment for physical and emotional problems (i.e., depression and anxiety, in particular) will not make them “go away.”
   - Get help to stop smoking (Alabama Quit Line 1-800-784-8669).

7. **Build your faith.**
   - Studies have shown that spiritual strength makes a difference in coping skills and satisfaction in life.

8. **Stay flexible and adaptable.**
   - Even the best plans will need to be changed some days.
   - Laugh a lot – humor and a smile does help!

Developed by Janet Johnston (Pediatric Pulmonary Center, Children’s Hospital) and Dr. Anne Turner-Henson (UAB School of Nursing) based on results of the study, Health promoting practices of family caregivers. The study was funded by the American Nurses’ Foundation, Fogarty International Short-Term Fellowship, and Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (Turner-Henson PI).