

Reducing the Risk of Caregiver Burnout

Providing care for an elderly or ill relative is a full-time job in itself, and can become especially difficult if the caregiver is also balancing work and family responsibilities. Too often, caregivers place so much focus on their caregiving duties that they experience feelings of stress, hopelessness and helplessness. Caregivers who are suffering from burnout often feel they have no time to take care of themselves or feel guilty if they take time away from their caregiving role.

If you have found yourself in a caregiving role, chances are you will experience some periods of stress. It is important to remember to take the time you need in order to care for yourself. The individual receiving care will benefit more from a happy and healthy caregiver than from a stressed and burned out caregiver.

Signs of Burnout

The following are some of the most common signs of caregiver burnout:

- Denial about the individual's condition
- Anger toward the individual or other family members
- Social withdrawal
- Anxiety about the individual's future care needs and your ability to meet those needs
- Depression
- Exhaustion or sleeplessness
- Loss of focus at work or while providing care
- General feelings of being overwhelmed
- Irritability or mood swings
- Health problems, either physical or mental

You may want to talk to your physician or contact your employee-assistance program if you are experiencing any of these signs.

Tips to Help Avoid Burnout

Use the following tips provided by the Alzheimer's Association to help manage your caregiving responsibilities while maintaining your own health and well-being:

- **Get a diagnosis as early as possible:** Symptoms of disease may appear gradually, and the individual may seem only slightly ill. If an illness is present, it is important to understand what you will be dealing with so that you are better able to manage present caregiving needs and plan accordingly for the future.

- **Know what resources are available:** For your own well-being and that of the person you are caring for, become familiar with care resources in your community. Adult daycare, in-home assistance, visiting nurses and meal delivery programs are just some of the community resources that can help.
- **Become an educated caregiver:** As the aging process or the individual's disease progresses, different caregiving skills and capabilities are necessary. Research the demands that may arise in order to better prepare to cope with future changes.
- **Get help:** Trying to do everything by yourself will leave you exhausted. The support of family and friends can be an enormous help if you are not afraid to ask. If you have difficulty asking for assistance, have someone close to you act as an advocate. If stress becomes overwhelming, do not be afraid to seek professional help or join a support group.
- **Take care of yourself:** Pay attention to yourself, especially your diet and exercise. Make sure to get plenty of sleep. Use respite services or the help of friends and family to take time off for shopping, a movie or a cup of coffee with a friend. Those close to you, including the individual you are caring for, want you to take care of yourself.
- **Manage your stress levels:** Stress can cause physical problems and changes in behavior. Note any changes in your body or in the way that you are feeling emotionally. Use relaxation techniques to help reduce stress and consult with your physician if necessary.
- **Accept changes as they occur:** The person who you are caring for will go through changes as their needs change. Aging relatives will often require care beyond what you can provide at home. A thorough investigation of available care options should make transitions easier, as will support and assistance from those around you.
- **Do legal and financial planning:** Consult an attorney and discuss issues related to durable power of attorney, living wills and trusts, future medical care, housing and other key considerations. Early planning will help alleviate stress later. If possible and appropriate, involve family members in planning activities and decisions.
- **Be realistic:** It may be difficult to see for yourself the values of your efforts, but the care that you provide does make a difference. Since you cannot control the future, allow yourself to grieve for the losses you experience, but also remember to focus on the positive moments as they occur. Now is the time to collect happy memories of the times that you have spent with your loved one.
- **Give yourself credit, not guilt:** Occasionally you may lose patience and at times, be unable to fulfill your caregiving duties in the way that you would like. Always remember that you are only human and that you are doing the best you can, and do not forget to give yourself credit. Being a devoted caregiver is not something to feel guilty about. Feel proud that you are there to provide care for your loved one.

Caregiver Support Groups

A caregiver support group can be a great way to find social support, build a network of caring individuals and find an outlet for your emotions, fears and frustrations. A support group consists of individuals with a common experience who are looking to connect with others.

Support groups are available in many communities as well as on the Internet. Some support groups have a general focus and are designed for caregivers of all ages and situations. Other groups have a more narrow focus and include members who are all coping with a certain disease or physical condition. It is important to evaluate the purpose of the support group so that you can connect with the group that will be most beneficial to you.

In order to locate support groups, consider contacting:

- Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Hospitals
- Libraries
- Senior centers
- Religious organizations
- The internet
- Condition-specific organizations, such as the Alzheimer's Association

Resources

- Family Caregiver Alliance: www.caregiver.org
- National Alliance for Caregiving: www.caregiving.org
- U.S. Administration on Aging: <https://aoa.acl.gov/>
- Office on Women's Health in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: www.womenshealth.gov
- The AGS Foundation for Health in Aging: www.healthinaging.org
- American Association of Retired Persons (AARP): www.aarp.org

Adapted in part from the Alzheimer's Association materials: www.alz.org

Here when you need us.

Call: 844-207-5465

Online: guidanceresources.com

App: GuidanceNowSM

Web ID: LivingME

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